

All will be well when the day is done

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All will be well when the day is done

by [abCEE](#)

Summary

The one where Yu Ziyuan time traveled but she thought that it was her *visions* of her *alternate life*.

She learned that there is a brat named Wei Ying who brought destruction to her and her family's life.

And so in her *present*, she vowed that she will *never allow* that to happen.

In which Yu Ziyuan found the four-year-old Wei Ying, newly pushed out of the inn where his parents left him, and decided that no, this child must *never* be associated with her, her family, and their sect at all.

And so Yu Ziyuan thought that she could bring him somewhere where someone may or may not find him but definitely far from where her husband could find him. If he's lucky, he'll survive that winter, if he's not, then death awaits the fevered child.

This is the extent of *mercy* that Yu Ziyuan could give *a child*.

With this, she'll raise her children without having to deal with a brat that brings trouble where he goes according to her *visions* of her *alternate life*.

Like the tag stated, this is definitely not Yu Ziyuan centric.

Notes

Hello!

Another 'short story' I was able to come up with while I'm stuck with my current fics. hehe. I wrote this for a few days, apologies for the lapses and mistakes.

This is a TIME TRAVEL FIX IT for our *main characters*.

IMPORTANT NOTES:

English is not my first language and I DO NOT HAVE A BETA since I prefer to work by myself so I ask for your understanding and I would like to apologize in advance for all the errors and mistakes in grammar, tenses, accidental misuse of pronouns, typos, etc.

If you are VERY SPECIFIC with this, I kindly ask you to NOT CONTINUE as there will be a lot of this here. Let us do this for yours and my peace of mind's sake, yes?

-Story elements are mainly based on the live-action/The Untamed drama but I may include scenes from the novel. Note that story diverged from the very beginning

-As I have mentioned, I will be claiming artistic license on a lot of scenarios (practices, medical inaccuracies, etc)

-I have long wished to write a time travel fic. I have a couple of drafts and this is the first one I was able to complete 😊

This is really self-indulgent.

-Note that all characters are OOC (OUT OF CHARACTER - character personalities/traits different from canon) and just like my other fics, a world-building

-I may recycle OC names from my other fic but their character may be different in this fic

-please tell me your thoughts as I truly enjoy reading them 💕

Title from: Day is Done by Peter, Paul, and Mary

Edit: I won't be allowing translations for this story. I'm sorry and thank you for your understanding.

Edit 2: Hello. If you are a new reader, I have a very big favor to ask you. Please-please, do not spoil the entire story in your bookmark notes 🙏 I understand that it is for you to easily go back to a fic but spoiling everything in your notes that could be read by those checking the bookmark page will lose half of the efforts given in writing this. I hope you'll understand 🙏

Oh... And if it wouldn't be a bother to you, I would also appreciate if you do not give scores/rating to the fic. I hope you'll understand this too 🙏

Thank you so much and I am truly hoping for your understanding 💕

Chapter 1

Yu Ziyuan snapped her eyes open when she came back to her senses.

She just had... The weirdest dream.

It felt more like a vision.

She felt like she lived that life.

But how?

She looked to her left side.

There was a baby cot with a sleeping baby wrapped in an orchid-colored blanket.

She just gave birth a couple of hours ago. Her precious A-Cheng.

She shut her eyes close as she took a deep breath to calm her nerves. She still feels tired but then she recalled the *dream* or the *vision* (?) once more.

In that *vision*, she saw a version of what she'd like to call her *alternate life*. She died there. She was not able to close her eyes but she *felt* her life left her body. The last vision she saw was Jiang Fengmian, her husband, reaching out to hold her hand. They both had swords pierced through their chests.

And she is certain that one person caused everything that went wrong in that *alternate life* of hers.

Yu Ziyuan gripped her knuckles until they turned white. She glanced at Zidian resting on her bedside. If she was wearing it, it could have crackled and oozed with killing intent.

Wei Ying. It was Wei Changze and Cangse Saren's son.

She called him a brat and good for nothing in that *alternate life*. He caused it all!

Fire lit inside her.

She does not know where the couple was but one thing is for sure: she would not allow such a child to enter their *family*.

That vision...

IT WILL NEVER HAPPEN.

And so Yu Ziyuan continued her life while counting the days.

Yanli was growing up weak and sickly. A-Cheng turned three and A-Li turned seven but she has not developed a fickle or any traces of golden core yet. Most novices begin their training for core formation at this age.

Yu Ziyuan decided that she'll make sure to make her A-Cheng a promising one. In her *vision*, A-Li never became any stronger. She did not even see her after she sent her A-Cheng and the brat on that boat.

Yanli would look at her mother with curious eyes but her mother would just sigh in frustration after checking her wrist.

"When will you build a core?"

"Laoshi said I am getting there, a-niang."

"I don't see it, A-Li."

She tried not to pout, "I'll work harder, a-niang."

"San-niang, do not pressure A-Li. Just because she has yet to form one does not mean she won't be able to form soon. It will take time."

Yu Ziyuan glared at him and stomped away, leaving the father and daughter bond over peeling Lotus pods.

Jiang Fengmian looked at his wife with a lingering gaze before he turned to look at her daughter.

"Come, let's go to the market and see what we could buy there, okay?"

"Okay, a-die!"

When her A-Cheng turned four, Yu Ziyuan knew that the time was ticking. She knew that the couple died when their son and A-Cheng was four.

She could remember how her husband counted the years and realized that the brat was four when his parents died.

"A-niang and a-die left while snowing. Inn-jiejie asked me to leave when they never returned."

So when it started snowing, she frequented her *night hunts*. She went to Yiling most of the time. Jinzhu and Yinzhu are on both of her sides.

On her fourth visit, she *finally* found him.

Dressed in dark blue winter robes, the innkeeper pushed him out of the inn while he was crying.

"A-niang and a-die said they'll come back!"

But the innkeeper turned her back on him. He ran to the side alley and cried.

Yu Ziyuan knew she had to do something.

'This brat destroyed my family, my sect!'

And so she approached him and instantly rendered him unconscious.

The thought of killing him was tempting.

"Yu-furen, you are not thinking..." Yinzhu and Jinzhu never questioned her decisions. Never in that *alternate life* and never in her *present* too.

Zidian crackled as she looked at the child unconscious on the ground.

"He has a fever," Jinzhu announced when she stooped down to check him. He was still breathing, of course.

Right.

Yu Ziyuan knows that there is no point in killing the child. The child of her *greatest enemy*. The child of the woman her husband is still pinning until now. The child of the man her husband considered his greatest subordinate. The child that caused the destruction of her *alternate life*.

Then a smirk formed on her face. It must be something *more* than just a smirk as her handmaidens looked at her with uncertainty in their eyes.

In that *alternate life* that she saw in her *vision*, she never truly was friends with anyone aside from her sworn sister, Li Shiyu - Madam Jin.

But she had people she *could not stand*. Perhaps, handing this brat to someone and having them deal with the consequences will be a greater enjoyment for her.

She made her decision.

They will bring him to a sect they do not have any connections to. A sect that fell in the *vision* that she saw.

The thought of that sect falling because of this brat instead of theirs gave satisfaction inside her.

The smirk on her face did not leave as she gripped her knuckles once more, Zidian crackling in the middle of the winter cold.

"Carry him. We're going to Gusu."

She *never* liked Lan Qiren, both in her *alternate life* and her *present*. They have met several times and he was just a pedantic man who followed his brother, Lan Qijun around until his brother went into seclusion. He became the acting sect leader and later became the sect leader after Lan Qijun's death six years after his wife's demise.

And of course, Lan Qiren was *another victim of Cangse Sanren*.

When they reached Caiyi, she decided that it was enough. The brat paled and shivered on their way as the snow became heavier when they reached the borders of Gusu. North has always been colder.

"Leave him there," she pointed at the broken cart on the back alley they landed on.

Her handmaidens did not move.

"Are you questioning me?!"

Jinzhu and Yinzhu immediately followed her orders. Jinzhu tried to take off her winter cloak but one crackle from Zidian made her stop.

She gave the brat one last glance.

If he's lucky, Lan Sect or someone will find him. If he's not, then it's his end, probably the last winter of his terrible life.

This is the extent of *mercy* that Yu Ziyuan could give *a child*.

Yu Ziyuan continued to live her life.

She trained the disciples and fought with Jiang Fengmian who spent too much time looking for a child he would never find. Yu Ziyuan does not even know if that fevered child survived that winter.

When the news of Wei Changze and Cangse Sanren's death reached them, her good-for-nothing husband went on a search. Like in her *alternate life*, they learned that the two cultivators succumbed to their wounds after killing two enraged beasts that were attacking villagers north of Yiling. Their swords were given to Jiang Fengmian when the villagers found them in the forest, mangled and almost unrecognizable.

In her *alternate life*, they never told anyone, even that brat about this. It was three years after the death of the two when the news arrived in Lotus Pier, both in her *alternate life* and *present*. Fengmian looked for the kid and found him when he was eight, a certified street urchin who lived in the street for four years.

Like in her *alternate life*, Jiang Fengmian insisted on putting memorial tablets in their Hall.

"Are they so important to you that they deserve to be included in the sacred hall of OUR family?!"

"San-niang, you have to understand! Changze and-"

"Isn't this a decision made by the two of us?! Or are you undermining me, Fengmian?!"

The conversation ended there.

Jiang Fengmian continued to look for the brat and Yu Ziyuan had enough.

"Jinzhu, I have an assignment for you."

The next time Jiang Fengmian returned home, his shoulders were slumped.

"I was too late. A-Ying was one of the children who died of the fatal flu that plagued children in Yiling and nearby territories. The one we were able to contain before it spreads in Yunmeng. One of the innkeepers confirmed his identity and showed me the mass grave where he was buried."

She did not show sympathy and instead, proceeded to train her A-Cheng to form his core early. In her *vision*, he only formed it when that brat arrived in Lotus Pier and now, he will never come.

Then news arrived in Lotus Pier three years later. Her A-Cheng turned nine while A-Li turned 12. Qinghengjun and Lan-furen - Liu Meiyue have officially left seclusion.

It was a total surprise to everyone. In her *alternate life* and *present*, they never truly learned the reason why Madam Lan lived in seclusion. Rumors spread of course, but no one truly believed the different versions of the stories. They just know that they *eloped* and that is why Qinghengjun went into seclusion for *punishment*. She will never understand how Cloud Recesses works and so she does not care.

Then Yu Ziyuan realized something.

Madam Lan - Liu Meiyue died when her A-Cheng was six in her *alternate life*. She could remember sending their condolences to the Lan Sect. It seemed like *something* changed.

And yet she does not care.

She continued to live, pushing the *vision* she had to the side.

Yu Ziyuan has successfully removed the bane of her existence in both *lives*. She does not care about the rest.

She'll focus on her life, her *children*, her *husband*, and *their sect*.

Jiang Cheng frowned when his father just patted his head after successfully pulling off the basic sword techniques.

“Good job, the rest of you,” Jiang Fengmian said to the rest of the disciples and dismissed them.

“A-Cheng,” he called.

“A-die.”

“Your dogs, have you fed them today?”

“I did! I’ll play with them later.”

“Leave the playing to some disciples.”

“Why?”

“We need to improve your stance.”

“But a-niang said it was fine-“

Something passed on Jiang Fengmian’s face and then he sighed.

“I’ll show you and see where you can improve.”

Jiang Cheng wanted to argue, it was his mother who taught him after all. His face scowled but he nodded. Jiang Fengmian momentarily saw his wife on that expression before he proceeded to show the form.

Jiang Cheng followed and mimicked his movements. He lost balance a couple of times and Jiang Fengmian helped him.

It is what Yu Ziyuan saw.

“Ah, so you finally realized that you have a son that needs your guidance?”

“San-niang-“

“Perhaps, if you showed the same enthusiasm from the beginning then you would not need to correct him in front of-“

“I dismissed everyone, no one is watching, san-niang. It is just A-Cheng and me here.”

“And yet I heard you did not compliment him in front of them!”

“San-niang-“

Jiang Cheng sighed as he pointed the practice sword to the ground. He does not think there will be more training after this. He'll just go and play with his dogs then.

Yu Ziyuan still argues with her husband.

She still thinks that Jiang Cheng still gets less than what he *deserves*.

Yanli still has weak cultivation with a little spark of her golden core. It is good that she could at least do well on arts and history but that would not save her from any night hunts. She has yet to join one.

Yet Yu Ziyuan lives her life and she'll stay that way especially without a brat loitering around Lotus Pier like what she saw in the *visions* she had of her *alternate life*.

Time passed and the news of Nie Yongwu's saber breaking in a night hunt with Qinghengjun with their eldest sons and few disciples were heard across the Cultivation World.

Nie Yongwu was fine but the saber was destroyed. It was said that Qinghengjun saved him when the saber suddenly broke in the middle of the fight.

Yu Ziyuan's brow raised.

In her *alternate life*, Nie Yongwu died a year after that night hunt after succumbing to the injuries he earned and a fatal qi deviation. The broken saber was only able to do much to

protect him and the disciples he brought died. His son was not with him at that time.

But now, he had Qinghengjun on that hunt, his son, Nie Mingjue, and Lan Qijun's eldest son, Lan Xichen were there. Both teenagers were building their names for themselves especially due to their accomplishments.

Nie Yongwu did not die of qi deviation after earning major injuries from that hunt.

Instead, he remarried for the third time. The Third Madam Nie was named. There was no Third Madam Nie in her *visions*. Nie Yongwu died too early and passed the leadership to his 17-year-old son.

Yu Ziyuan clicked her tongue. She does not know what causes these changes but it is fine.

Life in Lotus Pier continues.

"Who told you that you could loiter around just because I said it is break time?! No more break times for the next three weeks until you learn your lessons! What break time? Go do thirty laps on the lake! The last one to complete takes the punishment!"

"How will you lead a sect if you could only swing your sword that way?! Even a fly won't die with that attack! Jiang Cheng! Run twenty laps and repeat that form until you do it right!"

"A-Li, why are you just standing there?! You are not a servant, you are a cultivator! Go practice your forms with the female disciples! Yinzhu, facilitate!"

"Fengmian! I told you I would handle that! How could you make a decision without consulting me?! Are you undermining me now?!"

Truly, life in Lotus Pier continues.

Stories about the sons of Qinghengjun are once again heard. People were talking about Lan Xichen and Lan Wangji and some Lan disciples and it made Yu Ziyuan frown.

“Have you heard of Lan Xichen?! He is the sect heir. Have you heard of Nie Mingjue?! He is the sect heir. They have been making their names already, and you? Jiang Cheng, pick up your sword!”

“Even Lan Wangji, their spare heir is doing better. You’re going to a solo night hunt and I want you to return with a successful night hunt report!”

But her son was aided by Baling-Ouyang disciples and was injured in the said hunt. The mountain demon slipped away and was captured and killed by Lan disciples headed by Lan Xichen on their way back to Gusu after going on a hunt.

Yu Ziyuan snarled and doubled her son’s training.

“You’ll be facing them soon. Do not let them look down on you, you understand me, A-Cheng?”

“Yes, a-niang!”

“Good. Another round!”

Now that the *brat* is not in their life and probably not living in this world, it is time for her son to rise higher. It is time for his name to be known... to be the only name associated with Yunmeng-Jiang among the young masters.

That *alternate life* in her *vision* will be nothing but a dream.

Then the first discussion conference where Jiang Cheng, bestowed with his courtesy name Wanyin would join finally came. He is now 15 and in the same age group as the rest of the heirs.

The conference was in Qishan and she sent her son with a warning to come home as a victor. Yanli stayed behind even if she *encouraged* her to go since her betrothed was going to be there. She is still mad at how the visits of the two to each other's homes were nothing but a headache.

The brat was not there anymore to ruin it as he did in her *alternate life* and yet...

In that *alternate life*, that brat made Yanli *sad* after he cried and ran away from dogs when Jin Zixuan and his cousin chased him around with dogs in Koi Tower. Yanli did not talk to Zixuan and it seemed to have *delighted* her betrothed.

In her *present*, Yanli had to stop Jiang Cheng from attacking Jin Zixuan and his cousin for forbidding him on areas in Koi Tower, especially the kennels, claiming that he does not know how to take good care of his dogs.

"Ah, they are young, Ziyuan. They'll get by."

She recalled in her *vision* how her husband gave away their son's dogs just because the brat was afraid of it.

This time, her son got to keep the dogs but two of them were lost after their kennels were left open, only Princess was left. They weren't trained to be spiritual dogs and probably lost their way after leaving Lotus Pier.

In that *alternate life*, that brat pushed Jin Zixuan into the lake on his first visit. She punished him thoroughly.

In her *present*, her son pushed Jin Zixuan to the lake and the heir stomped out of Lotus Pier claiming he'll never return but he did come by the next day after staying in an inn for the night. She had to lock her son up in his room to *study and meditate* so they wouldn't cross paths in the duration of Jin Zixuan's stay.

"Ziyuan, my son hates it when he gets dirty. He still returned the next day so do not worry. I talked to him already."

Yu Ziyuan expected good results from the competition. Her *alternate life* showed that Yunmeng-Jiang did well.

Yet her son returned home with his shoulders slumped and her daughter ushered him to eat her soup, *as always*.

"I cannot believe Lan Qiren decided to keep this from me!" Her husband was smiling as if their sect's face was not damaged after the results were out.

"Fengmian! How could you still smile after-"

"San-niang! Wei Ying! Changze and Cangse's son is alive! I do not know how he reached Gusu but he is a Gusu-Lan inner disciple! He is Qiren's ward! He won first place in the archery competition!"

Yu Ziyuan felt her brows twitch as something ignited in her.

She could not name it but her eyes narrowed to the Lotus throne inside the Swords Hall.

That problem child... is alive and is in Gusu-Lan Sect.

Then she learned more from what happened at the conference.

The brat ranked first in the archery competition.

Followed by Lan Xichen and Lan Wangji tying on second.

Nie Mingjue on third.

Jin Zixuan on fourth.

Wen Qionglin, an *unknown* Wen disciple was even recognized for ranking fifth.

Her son did not place.

Yunmeng-Jiang, despite the rigorous training they had for archery still went short against Gusu-Lan and Qinghe-Nie for their overall standing.

Her *visions* of her *alternate life* reminded her that Lan Wangji did not join the competition as he was on secluded cultivation and was only out before the lectures where her children and that brat attended.

Her A-Cheng ranked fourth at that time. The brat still ranked first followed by Lan Xichen and Jin Zixuan.

Zidian crackled. All disciples stayed under the sun, shooting kites no matter how far they went until some passed out because of heat and fatigue.

No one said anything. She is the Madam of the Sect, the co-sect leader. It is her *right* to discipline and train their disciples as she sees fit.

Three months later, the ranking for the young masters of the present generation was made. It was based on level of cultivation, skills, gentry, and of course, looks.

Lan Xichen ranked first.

Lan Wangji ranked second.

Jin Zixuan ranked third. They said that Jin Guangshan paid for him to rank higher. They said that he only had an advantage on being part of the gentry so he got third place...

As Wei Wuxian ranked fourth.

Nie Mingjue ranked fifth.

Her A-Cheng ranked sixth.

They said that there are Three Jades of Lan. Her blood rose when she heard... that Wei Wuxian was called the Third Jade of Lan. He does not have Lan blood but he was named Lan Qiren's prize ward, he is technically a Lan. The third disciple of Gusu-Lan Sect.

She never heard of him in the South but it seems like he has been making his name with Lan Wangji in the North... or perhaps, *she chose not to listen as she does not care at all.*

They called him a genius. Friendly, outstanding, total sunshine -

Zidian broke five training dummies.

"Jiang Cheng! Pick up your sword! We're sparing until you could have Zidian retract back to its ring. How could an unknown brat rank higher than you?!"

"A-niang?"

"That Wei Ying! Find a way to beat someone who should be on a lower level than you in all aspects. I cannot believe this! I did not raise you to be a pushover!"

Jiang Wanyin gritted his teeth. Of all the people his mother would compare him to, it would have to be on that Wei Wuxian. His father patted his shoulder after ranking first when the competition was concluded.

He could remember how his father left a lot of times when he was younger, trying to look for the son of their friends. He realized that it was Wei Wuxian.

"Meet my son, Jiang Cheng."

"This one is Wei Ying, courtesy name Wuxian. It is nice to meet you Jiang-gongzi."

"Jiang Cheng, courtesy name Wanyin."

That Wei Wuxian made a lot of friends in that conference... and he captured his father's attention a lot of times whether he knew or not. That Wei Wuxian was mostly focused on being around Lan Xichen, Lan Wangji, and Qinghengjun seemed to dote on them a lot.

Now, his mother seemed to have her attention on him too.

Jiang Wanyin gripped Sandu.

First is Lan Xichen, then Lan Wangji, now there is Wei Wuxian to deal with. He still needs to deal with Jin Zixuan too.

Jiang Wanyin slashes on the air only for a strong whip to deflect his sword and made it land on the ground, clattering.

"What are you doing?! FOCUS!"

Then to Yu Ziyuan's surprise, Li Shiyu, Madam Jin, her sworn sister invited the *madams* of the great sects to Koi Tower for *tea*.

She has not met Liu Meiyue since she left seclusion but she heard stories. She is an outstanding furen to the Gusu-Lan sect... they said.

Nie Mingyu is the third wife of Nie Yongwu. She suffered miscarriage twice and decided not to try again for the sake of her health and instead, focused on raising Nie Mingjue and Nie Huaisang with *motherly love*.

Then there is Wen Yu, Wen Rouhan's famous concubine whom he bestowed his last name with but never bedded her.

She recalled her in her *vision* but she was never someone significant there. She could guess that her sworn sister just invited her to not anger Wen Rouhan.

And so she went.

She could see that Nie Mingyu and Liu Meiyue developed a close friendship. There were rumors that Nie Mingjue and Lan Xichen are courting but no official announcements were made. Cut-sleeve relationships are *quite* common but members of the gentry families *do not* deal with such. It is mostly about building alliances, having heirs, and of course, having a *trophy partner* beside you. She'll gut Jiang Fengmian if he ever treats her as one.

They shared *stories* while Yu Ziyuan chose to just *listen*.

"Zixuan was able to defeat that monster with his cohort of disciples. Guangshan was not pleased since it was a simple hunt but it was enough for a young teen."

"Ah, my heart almost gave away when A-Jue arrived in the Unclean Realm with blood all over his body! He had to repeatedly tell me and A-Sang that they were not his blood before I could even think of my next course of action. No one could blame me, they are sometimes too reckless and enjoys *fighting* way too much."

"Wen Xu does not stop training. I truly do not know how he and Wen Chao are on the opposite ends of a pole. While the other focuses on cultivation, the other focuses on... other things."

"My A-Huan and A-Zhan should get a break in between these hunts and cultivation training or I ask my husband to duel with me if they do not. Qiren would huff and turn away, always!"

"Ah, Lan-furen, the joy of crossing swords with your husband," Li Shiyu said and it made Liu Meiyue laugh.

"We met on a night hunt, we are both cultivators. I seldom night hunt unless I join my sons but I still like lifting my sword from time to time."

"I know a little about cultivation. I'm just lucky to have formed a core and... well... receive my husband's attention," Wen Yu drank her tea and they looked at her and nodded, not needing her to say more. Aside from her beauty, the fact that she could cultivate was one of the reasons why she captured Wen Rouhan's attention.

"I would not really know since I do not cultivate but my husband let me bring... things every time I leave Qinghe." Nie Mingyu chimed in.

"How about Jiang Cheng, Ziyuan? He has been training a lot lately, doesn't he?" Li Shiyu seemed to have noticed that she was not speaking.

She settled the teacup on the table.

"Doing better than before but needs *more* improvement."

Perhaps, finding someone to *challenge* her son will push him more to his limits. While listening to their conversation, she was already thinking about finding someone from Meishan to train with her son. Maybe, she could also find someone to train with Yanli. The training with Yinzhu and Jinzhu seemed to only do much to her level of cultivation.

She also had to sit there and *listen* to some stories that she does not wish to hear at all. She had to control her emotions to not let them show through Zidian.

Liu Meiyue was all praises to her *A-Ying*.

"Qiren found him in Caiyi, passed out, and was suffering from a very high fever. We almost lost him but thankfully, he survived. He lost all his memories but Qiren was able to conduct some -" she waved her hands, signifying that it was something she could not tell and they understood. Probably a clan secret.

"It was dangerous but it had to be done because the child already had a strong qi, there was a huge possibility that his parents were cultivators, Lan cultivators even. That is where we found out that he was Wei Changze and Cangse Sanren's son."

She just sipped her tea while the rest showed sympathy.

"We tried our best to tell him things about his parents based on those few interactions we had with them. Even Qiren painted portraits of them. He used to be quiet and sickly but as he grew up, he showed that he has Cangse's energy and personality but he also shared Wei Changze's temperament if needed."

Then Nie Mingyu fondly laughed and nodded.

"Aiyah! A ray of true sunshine! He befriended A-Sang who was too shy to everyone! My husband enjoys every conversation he has with him. A-Jue carried him to his saber when he was young and he cried so hard when it was time to go back to Gusu! I almost thought we'll have a saber made for him!" She shared.

"Ah, he befriended A-Ning, Qionglin when he came to Qishan. Our A-Qing was pleased that her brother has a friend because well... it is not a secret how my... stepsons are to others, even their cousin." Wen Yu added.

To her surprise, even Shiyu, her dearest sworn sister wanted to meet "this Wuxian that you all talk highly about! My Zixuan could use some friends!"

She did not say anything and just nodded. No one really asked if she wanted her A-Cheng to be *friends* with that brat.

No. She does not wish for any members of her family to be acquainted with the person who brought destruction to them in her *alternate life*. She has prevented that from happening by not letting her husband find the brat all those years ago.

He is Gusu-Lan's problem now. She'll wait and drink her tea when the time comes that news of the brat bringing destruction to Gusu-Lan reaches Lotus Pier. Sooner or later, it will happen because that *child* is a form of bad luck.

Yu Ziyuan clicked her tongue.

She eyed Liu Meiyue. She is beautiful and she could feel her core, *powerful*. She was a rogue cultivator with an unknown background. Gusu-Lan does not really look into someone's background. They are too romantic that it sometimes makes her want to puke.

Best furen? Perhaps they could cross swords one day and see.

When she returned to Lotus Pier, she finally got to release the anger she bottled up in Koi Tower.

She pulled Jiang Cheng from picking Lotus pods. Everyone scampered away.

"How could you waste your time doing useless things while other young masters your age are busy making names for themselves?!"

"What-"

She was seeing red at how her son was scowling. She could see Yanli trying to intervene but one look from her made her daughter sigh and turn around to leave.

"You're an heir! A rightful young master! How could some *ward*, A BRAT rank higher than you?! Have you heard of his achievements?!"

Lan Wangji and that Wei Wuxian were already making their names. Lan Xichen and Nie Mingjue gained the titles Zewujun and Chifengzun respectively. They said that it is only a

short while until people would come up with titles for the Second and Third Jade.

She had to tune out of the conversation which involved that brat the whole time they were having their *tea*. She is contemplating going to another one if her sworn sister decides to invite them once more.

“Maybe we could bring the boys together and hunt and perhaps share skills, yes?”

She’ll make sure that even if his son is the youngest basing on the birth month against Lan Wangji and Jin Zixuan (because she will not include that brat in the list of the ‘boys’ that they were talking about) she’ll make sure that he shows that he is an extremely capable young master as well.

Then finally, they were to send their children to Gusu for lectures. A lot of people are talking about how *promising* this batch of students will be as they were mostly heirs and high-ranking disciples from gentry families.

She *prepared* her children for this including the disciples who will accompany them.

"Do not ruin the face of the sect! Do not embarrass us and do not allow others to intimidate and be any higher against you! Show them what Yunmeng-Jiang is capable of!"

Jiang Wanyin has been waiting for this event to finally come. The famed Gusu-Lan lectures.

“A-jie, we will be meeting the other young masters there.”

“We will, A-Cheng. Are you looking forward to it?”

He scoffed.

“I am.”

Jiang Yanli smiled and patted his head. They were seated on a boat on their way to Gusu. He will show everyone, especially his mother that they will not tarnish the name of Yunmeng-Jiang, especially in front of those young masters.

“Let’s have fun and learn a lot on this trip, A-Cheng. I am sure that a-niang and a-die will like that.”

“Of course, a-jie.”

He gripped Sandu tighter.

He also looks forward to seeing Wei Wuxian.

‘Let’s see what he could do as to how and why he captured my parents’ attention.’

He has worked hard not to lag behind the other disciples. He is in his best shape. He’ll *show* them what Yunmeng-Jiang is capable of.

News came from Gusu and reached Lotus Pier.

Wen Chao, the Second Young Master of Qishan-Wen threw tantrums for not being allowed to enter Cloud Recesses despite *escorting* his cousins who did not have any invitations for the lectures. It has been decades since the last batch of Wen disciples came to study in Cloud Recesses.

Stories about how he tried to cause a fire but he could not burn even the robes of the Lan disciples to threaten them. They never heard of fireproof robes... but it seems like Gusu-Lan came up with one.

Yu Ziyuan raised her brow.

Wen Qing and Wen Qionglin were allowed to enter as *"Gusu-Lan does not turn down anyone, especially students who came for additional learnings."*

She wanted to call them hypocrites yet she realizes that that *anyone* included the brat. Lan Qiren found him and brought him to Cloud Recesses. Took him as his ward and named him his Prized Student aside from his nephews.

Wen Chao was not allowed to enter because *he was not going to study* there. He came as an escort and the two *disciples*, his cousins, arrived safely.

Months passed and life continued on Lotus Pier. Yu Ziyuan trained the disciples, goes on her personal night hunts to spread her title Violet Spider further, and of course, she *deals* with her husband daily.

They were arranged and they *never* showed *affection* to each other. The gifts and accessories that Jiang Fengmian gives her are just stacking up in a lacquer box in her room.

“These are gifts that do not fit my taste. He must be thinking of someone else when she bought them.” She clicked her tongue.

And then Jiang Fengmian was called to Gusu.

Jiang Wanyin punched Jin Zixuan.

Yu Ziyuan was too angry as she recalled who did it in her *visions*. She destroyed five new dummies using Zidian but her anger was still flaring inside her.

She went with her husband.

"That brat must have something to do with this! He'll see!"

Zidian crackled in the air as they flew in the direction of Gusu. There was no point in riding a boat since it is for *their son* after all.

Ending notes:

The next chapter will be about what went on in Gusu because of course, it should be 😊 No WangXian for this chapter yet but I promise, this is about them 🤔 😊 😊

I never really thought I'll get to finish it but here I am posting 😊

Happy Birthday to our dear Wang Yibo 🎉

Keep safe and have a nice day 💕

Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

Hello!

I really do not know what to say after receiving all your comments/read your thoughts about the fic. When I first had the idea/plot, I did not know if I could materialize it. Later, I did and then I decided to post without much expectations and yet... 🙄 Thank you so much for reading, commenting, and leaving kudos to this fic. I appreciate it so much! Thank you!

-This chapter starts from the 'beginning' as well. The next chap is where the first two chapters will meet. I ask for your understanding if you have been waiting for that. hehe.

-as stated on the tags, I would like to repeat that I am taking *artistic license* on everything including medical practices/conditions, ceremonies, honorifics, etc. (There will be a lot of it in this chap) Please take everything with a grain of salt. This is still fiction.

-this chapter is way longer than the first just because! 😊

-oh, and YZY is not in this chapter, thought I'd let you know. hehe.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Lan Zhan's earliest memory was when he went to visit his mother once a month in the Gentian House together with Lan Huan starting when he was three and his brother was six. Their mother would open the door and welcome them in her arms. They would spend the whole afternoon with her until it was time for their uncle to fetch them.

Then when he turned five, he was not able to see his shufu for a couple of months. It was Elder Nainai, the Elder in charge of the nursery who accompanied him and Lan Huan to go and see their mother.

He learned that his shufu was always in the medical pavilion. Gossip is forbidden but he *heard* that his shufu brought a child after he went to Caiyi a few months ago.

Later on, their mother opened the door and welcomed them to her embrace as always. When they entered, seated on Liu Meiyue's cushion was a child.

"His name is Wei Ying. He is four and will turn five next month. He will live with us here in Cloud Recesses from now on," his mother said as she fixed his and Lan Huan's forehead ribbons.

The child did not have one *yet*. He was wearing white and blue Gusu-Lan robes with a cloud pattern on his chest.

He and Lan Huan greeted him like how nainai and shufu taught them. Wei Ying blinked and then he bowed his head. It was a little clumsy but their mother said that the three of them did great. Lan Huan smiled and Wei Ying just stared. Lan Zhan stared at him.

Their mother -- their a-niang called him A-Ying.

He and Lan Huan learned that A-Ying does not talk.

"He was sick when your shufu found and brought him in. He recently got well and your shufu thought that you could be friends with him. The healers are positive that he'll still be able to talk so we should talk to him so he'll learn more words."

Lan Zhan and Lan Huan nodded, putting the assignment to heart.

Even if A-Ying does not talk, he draws. Liu Meiyue gave them paper and brush instead of letting them read in front of her like they always do. Lan Zhan can only read characters for now but nainai said he's doing good. Lan Huan could read now, he is amazing and Lan Zhan wishes to be like his dada when he grows up.

Wei Ying drew bunnies and showed them to Liu Meiyue. She smiled, patted his head, and told him he did great. She then showed it to them. Lan Huan complimented it and Lan Zhan stared. Lan Zhan thinks they could really be friends.

They did not meet often since Wei Ying was still sick and needed to recover. Their mother said that he has a weak immune system and the healers need to monitor and help him get well. Getting exposed to a lot of people may cause him harm.

Every month, Lan Zhan and Lan Huan would meet Wei Ying in the Gentian House and they would make sure that they are clean before they enter. Wei Ying has slowly warmed up to them. He smiles a little now instead of the usual curious gazes he has and Lan Zhan thinks that his smile is bright. His eyes smile like his dada too!

Then their uncle finally returned to being their teacher. His shufu looks... better than Lan Zhan expected. He did not frown nor held a stern expression on his face. He has a different expression, softer and Lan Zhan does not know how to name it yet.

"The fever had taken all of A-Ying's memories. A-Ying's parents were my friends, we attended the lectures together. I pledged in their name that I will take good care of their son."

"Adopting him shufu?" Lan Zhan's dada asked.

There was an emotion that passed their uncle's face that they did not understand, Lan Zhan momentarily met his eyes before Lan Qiren shook his head.

"He will be my ward. I will treat him like my son would wish to give my name to him... but I would want A-Ying to carve his own path while bringing his parents' name," Qiren eyed the two of them. "I will let him call me shushu."

Not Shifu or grandmaster, not Shishu or martial uncle since he will be joining the sect but *shushu* .

Lan Zhan did not really understand why because shufu has always been shufu, why are others calling him other names?

Each time they meet Wei Ying in the Gentian House, he looks healthier than the last time they saw him. He moves more now than just sitting and observing but he still behaves when Liu Meiyue fixes their hair.

"A-Ying will receive his ribbon when he begins his formal studies when he turns six like all the disciples in our sect."

Wei Ying blinked and pointed his finger to the ribbon on Lan Zhan and Lan Huan's forehead. Lan Meiyue nodded. Lan Zhan stared again.

Then Lan Huan asked Wei Ying to call him gege.

"A-Zhan calls me dada, it is gege in Gusu dialect. A-Ying can call me gege if he does not know the dialect yet."

Wei Ying's face lit up, he smiled and wrote the characters for gege. They were surprised.

"Your shufu also teaches A-Ying so he won't lag behind when he joins the other children for the formal studies. A-Ying is smart like A-Huan and A-Zhan," their mother told them as she patted their heads.

When Lan Zhan turned six, it coincided with the day of their visit to the Gentian House. Lan Huan greeted him and gave him a pinwheel that he played with until it was time to go.

When they arrived at the Gentian House, their mother was waiting with Wei Ying beside her, clad with a heavy winter cloak. They said that Wei Ying's immune system is improving and he should begin getting used to the different weather of each season now.

Wei Ying waved at him and after they were hugged by Liu Meiyue and she greeted Lan Zhan happy birthday, Wei Ying threw himself to him for a hug. The cloak fell and Lan Zhan almost panicked as what if Wei Ying gets cold? But his a-niang just laughed and wrapped Wei Ying with the cloak once more and brought them in.

There was a lot of food on the table. There were sweets that they were usually not allowed to eat. Liu Meiyue winked at them.

"This is the first birthday that A-Ying could attend and it is A-Zhan's so a-niang prepared everything!"

Then to everyone's (especially Lan Zhan's) surprise, Wei Ying took something under the table and handed the parchment to Lan Zhan.

"Happy birthday Lan Zhan."

They momentarily got stunned and it made Wei Ying blush but Lan Meiyue was quick to compliment him and said that he had a nice voice. Lan Huan also hugged Wei Ying who beamed and hugged him back. His smile was truly bright, Lan Zhan could compare it to the sun.

When Lan Zhan looked at the parchment, he blinked fast, and then he smiled as he held it gently, afraid to crumple the edges.

It was a portrait with six bunnies. It was a bit messy for a painting of five years old but Lan Zhan could clearly tell.

They all had forehead ribbons but one had an additional red ribbon on his waist. Lan Zhan looked at Wei Ying who pointed at the ribbon tied at the knot of his belt. They have seen the ribbon since the first time they met him.

"Your shufu said he had it with him when he found him so he thought that it was something that belonged to his parents. Your shufu wanted A-Ying to have it with him all the time."

Lan Zhan understood. It was *their family*.

Bunny Wei Ying stood beside bunny shufu who was holding his bunny paw. Bunny dada stood beside bunny a-die, bunny A-Zhan stood beside bunny a-niang who was holding bunny a-die's paw.

It was beautiful. Lan Zhan will have to ask for his dada's help to have it framed and displayed in their bed-chamber.

"Thank you, Wei Ying."

Wei Ying just smiled and waved his hand as he blushed. Lan Zhan could feel his ears warm and with the way his a-niang and his dada were looking at him, he thinks it turned red again and his a-niang always teases him about that.

In the end, his a-niang also gave him a rattle drum with a five-petal flower painted by her. Lan Zhan held his gifts carefully when it was time to leave.

Then Lan Zhan's formal studies began. His father did not show up on the first day as he did on Lan Huan's first day of formal studies. Lan Zhan was told that Qinghengjun had very important matters to attend to.

He does not know what was going on but he knows that *something* was going on.

It was *something* that Lan Zhan and Lan Huan did not know.

Then *suddenly* ... They were told that they did not need to go to the Gentian House anymore.

Lan Zhan wanted to ask why but he knows he cannot question the elders.

But he asked Elder Nainai. She smiled and kissed his head, "patience, little A-Zhan. Patience little one."

He knew he had to be patient but each time he notices something *wrong*, he feels his heartbreak a little more.

He was not able to see Wei Ying either.

He would climb up to his dada's bed and sleep beside him. Lan Huan would hug him tight and hum the lullaby their mother always sings.

He tried to think of anything he did wrong. They started their formal studies and perhaps... Was it because he made a couple of mistakes during calligraphy class? Or was it when he forgot to pronounce three -- no four syllables properly while reciting rules 1-50? Or was it --

He wanted to go and kneel in front of his a-niang's door and apologize for his mistakes. He promised himself he'll do well in class as Lan Huan does.

"There is nothing wrong with making mistakes, A-Zhan. Nainai said we should be patient so let us wait until we are allowed to go see a-niang and A-Ying, okay?"

He sometimes thought of visiting Wei Ying in the medical pavilion too, or maybe their uncle's quarters but there are simply just countless people around for a six-year-old Lan Zhan to sneak without getting caught.

Then one day, one of their teachers entered the classroom and he was followed by someone familiar. He had a forehead ribbon with silver cloud insignia like Lan Zhan and Lan Huan have.

"Wei Ying," he muttered. Wei Ying was smiling brightly and he greeted everyone like how shufu taught Lan Zhan before. He thought he wouldn't be able to hear that voice anymore.

Their teacher said that Wei Ying was officially joining the class.

Lan Zhan somehow felt a little happy to finally see Wei Ying. He speaks when asked a question, he recites when he knew the answer. Lan Zhan had to remind himself to focus instead of looking at him.

When the class ended, Wei Ying walked out with Lan Zhan and followed the seniors who fetched them.

"Are you sad because we cannot come to the Gentian House anymore?" Wei Ying asked.

Lan Zhan pursed his lips as he looked down. He felt Wei Ying's hand gently caressing his back. It felt like what their mother does when they're a little upset when visiting her because of their private studies.

"Lan Zhan, shushu said that we'll meet shimu soon. Be patient. It is in the rules, right?"

Lan Zhan still wanted to go and see but Wei Ying was following him around since he joined the class. They only separate when it's time for bed. Wei Ying lives in Lan Qiren's quarters while Lan Zhan lives in the nursery's sleeping quarters he shares with Lan Huan.

They sometimes practice reading together, or calligraphy, or learn proper meditation, or Wei Ying will simply tell him about the things he does either in the medical pavilion or Lan Qiren's residence. Lan Zhan lets him because he likes Wei Ying's voice and the way he talks. Sometimes, he was still reminded of that time when Wei Ying did not speak.

"Ji-daifu said that I could learn how to swim next season. Huan-gege said he'll teach us. You'll join right, Lan Zhan?"

"Mn."

"Let's go to the Dining Hall now, Lan Zhan!" And Wei Ying held his hand as he led the way. Lan Zhan followed him at a sedate pace. Wei Ying has been holding his hand wherever they go since he joined the class. It reminds Lan Zhan of how his dada does the same when they're out and there's a crowd. Even if there's no crowd in Cloud Recesses, Lan Zhan likes it.

He held Wei Ying's hand tighter. It made Wei Ying giggle.

They once ate dinner with their uncle who seemed to be busy lately. He asked Lan Zhan and Lan Huan to look after Wei Ying.

"He recovered well but we do not want to push him further until we are sure that he won't relapse. He also needs to adjust to life outside my quarters and the medical pavilion. I trust A-Huan and A-Zhan to help me."

Lan Zhan thinks that Wei Ying was adjusting well. He became friends with everyone in their class. There are still times he goes silent but his presence was too bright to be ignored. He'll

also continue to draw, mostly bunnies and he'll give it to Lan Zhan. Lan Zhan already has a box that he plans to fill with Wei Ying's paintings since they first met. He framed and displayed his birthday gift on his fifth birthday with the help of Elder Nainai and Lan Huan.

It took five full moons. Five months. Lan Zhan was counting the days until he could see his a-niang again.

One day, right after the end of their class, Yizhen-laoshi was smiling at someone at the door. They waited for her to signal them to greet but Yizhen-laoshi nodded and covered her mouth to hide her smile.

She then asked everyone to leave orderly.

Lan Zhan and Wei Ying left the room last because it was their assignment for the day to check the tables if anyone left their things. They always take this assignment seriously!

When they finished and Lan Zhan was the one who reached out to hold Wei Ying's hand, he found Wei Ying smiling so brightly. When Lan Zhan looked at the door... There, his a-niang was standing, waiting, looking so beautiful, *fresh*. She was wearing beautiful white and blue robes, a jade token was hanging on her belt and she was wearing a forehead ribbon with a silver cloud insignia in the center. Her hair was beautifully fixed with a silver headpiece.

Lan Zhan was not able to hold his gasp. He forgot about the rules as he ran and directly landed in his a-niang's waiting embrace. He felt himself getting carried and his a-niang actually twirled while laughing, it sounded so beautiful to Lan Zhan's ears.

"I missed you too, little one."

"A-niang." His voice broke as he hugged her tighter.

Liu Meiyue also welcomed Wei Ying in her arms.

"I missed you too, A-Ying."

"I missed you, shimu!"

Liu Meiyue laughed and patted Wei Ying's head.

Lan Huan has asked Wei Ying why he calls their mother shimu. It was their mother who explained.

"Your shufu chose not to adopt A-Ying and decided to be his guardian and made A-Ying his ward instead. He insisted on being called shushu by A-Ying instead of any other titles."

"What will A-Ying call a-die then?"

"Shifu and that is why he calls me shimu."

"Ah, I missed you, kids. How about we go and see A-Huan then we'll eat snacks in the Gentian House, hm?"

Lan Zhan and Wei Ying took each of her hands and walked towards Lan Huan's classroom.

Slowly, the disciples started coming out, and finally, Hong-laoshi came out with Lan Huan. Lan Zhan was bouncing on his feet, waiting for his dada to notice.

When he *finally* turned to face their direction, Lan Zhan saw how his dada's expression turned from stunned then to surprised, and he glanced at Hong-laoshi who smiled and nodded. Lan Zhan watched as Lan Huan closed the remaining distance between them and hugged their mother too. Lan Zhan and Wei Ying stood at the side as they watched Lan Zhan's dada hug their mother tightly.

"Welcome back, *Lan-furen* ," Hong-laoshi greeted and Liu Meiyue smiled and greeted back.

They ate snacks in the Gentian House even if it was against the rules. The entire room smelled like lavender, so much like their mother. It seems like nothing has changed since the last time they came.

After eating snacks, Liu Meiyue helped Lan Zhan and Wei Ying with their homework and assisted Lan Huan with his calligraphy practice.

"A-niang," Lan Zhan called.

"Yes, A-Zhan?"

"Not going anymore?"

The question caught his a-niang off guard and Lan Zhan almost apologized and took it back when his a-niang smiled and shook her head.

"Not anymore."

Then to their surprise, Lan Qiren came and Lan Zhan thought they were being fetched and that the visit was over.

"We're eating dinner in the Hanshi," Liu Meiyue announced, which obviously surprised Lan Zhan as he looked at his dada who held the same expression on his face. Wei Ying was smiling as he reached out to hold Lan Qiren's hand. He is always excited to see him.

They walked towards the Hanshi and Wei Ying was telling Lan Qiren about his day while Lan Zhan and Lan Huan held their mother's hands.

When they reached the Jingshi, Qinghengjun - Lan Qijun, their a-die was waiting in front of the open door.

They formally greeted him, including Wei Ying.

"Come in," a-die said and Lan Zhan tried his best not to stare. It was forbidden and considered rude but this is the first time he was seeing his a-die. He was there during Lan Huan's first day of formal studies but he was not around for Lan Zhan. They said that their father had a very important matter to attend to even in seclusion. Lan Zhan did not know what to feel.

He just knew that his a-die was there on the day of his birth, held him, and gave him his name.

Lan Qijun sat down and Liu Meiyue sat beside him.

"A-Zhan, I believe that I have to apologize for missing your first day of formal studies," he said as he reached out his hand to Lan Zhan. Lan Zhan looked at his a-niang, shufu, his dada, and Wei Ying before he reached out and felt his little hand be enveloped in a wide, rough, and warm hand. The calloused finger caresses the back of his little palm.

"A-die had to do something *very* important that resulted in us being able to meet like this. I am sorry. Will A-Zhan forgive me?"

Lan Zhan blinked. He did not know what to say. Everything felt *new* to him.

Unconsciously, he nodded. A-die smiled and Lan Zhan's lips parted in surprise. His dada had the same smile as a-die!

"A-Huan, I would have to apologize too. To you and Lan Zhan... for..." Lan Qijun swallowed hard as he reached out for Lan Huan. "For not being there."

Lan Huan did not say anything as he looked as stunned as Lan Zhan. Wei Ying was watching everything with interest as he sat beside Lan Qiren. Lan Zhan blinked.

"Are you and a-niang..." Lan Huan looked at their parents.

With a smile on his face, Lan Qijun nodded, and slowly, he let go of their hands and opened his arms. Lan Zhan glanced at Lan Huan first. When Lan Huan took his first step, Lan Zhan did too, and soon enough, they were inside their father's embrace.

Lan Zhan felt their father sob and when he glanced to his right, their mother was crying. Lan Huan was shedding tears as well. Wei Ying was hugging their uncle.

Ah, so this is what it is like to be in a father's embrace like how he sees some of his classmates when senior Lan disciples (their fathers) bring them to class. Lan Zhan realized that *he likes it*. It is different from shufu's hug yet he *likes it* and he thinks that his dada likes it too.

Lan Zhan felt their father hug them tighter.

“I am sorry.”

Lan Zhan found himself caressing their father's back like how their mother does to them. Lan Huan did the same.

Later, Lan Qijun and Liu Meiyue told them that they were leaving seclusion but it must be kept as a secret within the sect for now. The other sects must not know yet.

Lan Zhan does not truly know what seclusion is aside from knowing that his parents cannot leave their respective quarters. They cannot meet other people aside from those authorized ones like shufu to both of them. Like him and Lan Huan who were allowed to visit their mother once a month.

The three of them made a promise and mimicked their mother's actions of putting their finger on their lips and saying ‘shhh.’

Lan Zhan's life in Cloud Recesses changed after that day.

Liu Meiyue was seen around Cloud Recesses. She joins them on meals in the Hanshi: Lan Qijun, Liu Meiyue, Lan Qiren, and the three kids.

As the end of his seclusion was not yet announced outside Cloud Recesses, Qinghengjun focused on intra-sect duties. He even surprised disciples when he would randomly show up and take over on teaching renowned Gusu-Lan techniques be it on swords, martial arts, or music.

Lan Zhan and Wei Ying were wide-eyed when instead of a senior disciple demonstrating basic sword forms for the novices to be familiarized with them, Qinghengjun entered their class in his full glory and raised his sword to demonstrate in front of the excited little kids. Lan Zhan felt his ears warm when his a-die playfully winked at him and Wei Ying before he left. His a-die was too much like his a-niang when his shufu was not around!

Lan Zhan noticed a lot of difference around Cloud Recesses but his thoughts are mostly overpowered by the presence of his a-niang who plays with the novices when she is free from her duties as the furen of the sect, of his a-die who flew him, his dada, and Wei Ying on the mountains of Gusu when he's free from Sect duties, of his dada's beautiful flute music as he has been learning how to play qin and flute at the same time, of his shufu's classes with his light and fond gazes, of Wei Ying and his beautiful laughter and contagious energy... Lan Zhan's little body could barely care for other things!

Slowly, their father also announced lessening the number of rules, removing the things he deemed *unnecessary and without context*. He also modified some. Their uncle just huffed but

it brought so much joy to the disciples.

Wei Ying laughed so hard when they were in the Gentian House, saying that Lan Qiren was complaining about it the whole time in their quarters. He immediately chastised himself, “Oops! Gossip is forbidden. Talking about others behind their backs is forbidden,” he covered his lips, and then he snickered. Liu Meiyue laughed with him too.

Lan Zhan never thought that he’ll like the sound of laughter after he got used to silence. The laughter of the people around him, especially his a-niang and Wei Ying’s laughter made Lan Zhan smile and softly, laughter came out of him too.

When they turned 11 and Lan Huan, courtesy name Xichen, was 14, they enjoyed hearing his stories after he had finally joined night hunts with juniors his age.

“Can we go to Qinghe?” Wei Ying randomly asked after dinner. No talking while eating is still a rule but it has two additional words in the end, *unless necessary*.

“Why do you want to go to Qinghe, A-Ying?” Liu Meiyue asked.

“Huan-gege told us stories of the time he met Nie-gongzi and saw his saber up close. I want to see a saber too! Shushu, can we go see sabers?” Wei Ying used his powerful batting of lashes, big round eyes, and little pout to support his argument.

Lan Qiren pursed his lips as he looked at Liu Meiyue and Lan Qijun. Lan Zhan made sure to look at his shufu too and then his a-die with his *most* innocent face for good measure.

Lan Qijun laughed and Lan Zhan felt triumphant.

“How can we say no to that? I will see any business we could do in Qinghe and I’ll send a message to Nie-zongzhu then we’ll go. Is that okay with you, A-Zhan, A-Ying?”

“Yes, a-die.”

“Yes, Shifu!”

“And A-Huan? You can go hunt with Nie-gongzi again. I heard a lot of good things about him. He’s 16 and you’re 14, you’re still in the same age group so going on night hunts together will be beneficial for skill sharing and learning.”

“I would like that too, a-die.”

“Good-good. Will you join us, laopo?” Lan Zhan watched as their father reached out to hold their mother’s hand who laughed and nodded.

“Who would stop you from spoiling the three if I’m not there?”

Lan Qiren huffed which just made Wei Ying laugh and lean on his arm. Lan Zhan watched his uncle gently pat Wei Ying's head.

Lan Zhan has seen sabers through drawings and illustrations shown in class. It was the first time he saw them in person. They were much bigger and looked heavier than swords used in Cloud Recesses.

Nie Mingjue welcomed them with his brother named Nie Huaisang, 11 years old too but he looked smaller than Lan Zhan and Wei Ying and he looked shy.

“It is our pleasure to welcome Qinghengjun, Lan-furen, Lan-gongzi, Lan-er-gongzi, and Wei-gongzi to the Unclean Realm. Father just had to deal with an emergency situation that is why he failed to welcome you, he expresses his apologies.”

“That’s not a problem. I hope things are well?” Lan Qijun replied as they followed him inside.

“Everything is well, Qinghengjun. Father will see you in the hall in a short while.”

“Hi! I’m Wei Ying. He is Lan Zhan, you’re Nie Huaisang, right?”

Lan Zhan blinked as Wei Ying started the conversation with Nie Huaisang who almost drowned in the robes of Nie Mingjue with how much he was trying to make himself invisible by sticking beside him. Nie Huaisang nodded.

“Let’s be friends! You’re our first friend outside Cloud Recesses and you have a beautiful fan! Right, Lan Zhan?”

“Mn. Friends.”

Nie Huaisang looked at his brother with wide eyes while Nie Mingjue tried to nudge him closer to them.

“I told you, Nie-gongzi, my brothers are going to be friends with yours,” Lan Xichen said.

“I have more. Want to see them?” Nie Huaisang asked shyly as he waved his fan in front of them. Wei Ying nodded and Lan Zhan followed. Nie Huaisang then looked at Nie Mingjue again. It made his older brother laugh.

“We’ll have to wait for father to meet them and then you can ask permission from Qinghengjun and Lan-furen to play with them, is that fine?”

“Okay, da-ge.”

But there was an emergency. Qinghengjun offered help and they brought Lan Xichen along with Nie Mingjue and a few disciples.

“Come back safe. I’ll wait,” Liu Meiyue told his husband who smiled and nodded. Lan Qijun patted Lan Zhan and Wei Ying’s head before he put his hand on Lan Xichen’s upper back and guided him to follow Sect Leader Nie - Nie Yongwu and Nie Mingjue. Nie Huaisang’s eyes were teary but Wei Ying nudged him.

“Don’t worry. Shifu and Huan-gege, your father and your da-ge will return soon. Should we go see your fans? Can we, shimu?”

Liu Meiyue took a deep breath and gave the leaving group one last glance before she turned to the kids and nodded.

“I’d like to see Nie-er-gongzi’s fans too. Will he allow me to join?”

“Yes, Lan-furen! Let’s go! Father bought me new brushes and paints too!”

When the night hunting party returned, a few disciples were injured but everyone was alive. Nie Yongwu’s saber was destroyed. Lan Qijun played Clarity for the Nies due to the stress of the broken saber of their Sect Leader.

Cai Mingyu arrived. She was known around Unclean Realm as someone that Nie Yongwu was courting. She got a word of what happened and came as soon as possible. They were introduced to her as well.

When they left, Lan Meiyue managed to make Nie Mingjue and Nie Huaisang call her Yue-ayi or Aunt Yue.

The Nies thanked the Lans for their help with that emergency night hunt.

“Without your help... I wouldn’t know...” Nie Yongwu glanced at his sons and Cai Mingyu then back to Lan Qijun who smiled at him and nodded.

“I did what I had to do.”

Wei Ying shed tears and did not wish to leave Nie Mingjue after they were brought to fly with Baxia, his saber. It took a lot of coaxing and a promise to fly with Baxia when they meet again (Lan Zhan was subtle but Lan Xichen held a chuckle when he saw his brother's expression, eyes sticking on Baxia as well).

And of course, Lan Qijun, Liu Meiyue, Lan Xichen, Lan Zhan, and Wei Ying returned to Cloud Recesses with new fans from Nie Huaisang.

Nie Yongwu got married to Cai Mingyu, now Nie Mingyu. Nie Huaisang sent Lan Zhan and Wei Ying letters about having a younger sibling soon.

But they heard nothing about it later.

Then another letter about another sibling.

And nothing once more.

Liu Meiyue gathered Lan Zhan and Wei Ying in her arms and explained that the babies passed without getting born. It was sad for them and they asked to go to Qinghe to give comfort to their friends and Mingyu-ayi who was nice and gave them candies she made.

One afternoon, while Cloud Recesses was busy preparing for the naming and sword giving ceremony of the new batch of junior disciples, 12-year-old Lan Zhan and soon-to-be 12-year-old Wei Ying, were in the back hills of Cloud Recesses.

“Lan Zhan, shh!” Wei Ying signaled him to keep quiet even if he was not making any noise as he followed him.

“If we make any noise, they’ll run away!”

“Wei-“

“Shh!” and he pulled his lips into a thin line as he continued to follow him.

“Oh no!” Wei Ying’s gasp made Lan Zhan look in the direction where he was looking. His eyes widened in surprise.

“Come, let’s help them!” Wei Ying stooped down and gently pulled the black bunny's leg from a huge stone. Lan Zhan moved closer and cradled the white bunny that was beside the black bunny.

“I don’t think it’s injured,” Wei Ying muttered as he checked the tiny leg.

“Wei Ying...”

Lan Zhan received a giggle as a response as Wei Ying handed him the black bunny as well.

“My gifts! Belated happy birthday, Lan Zhan!” he beamed. Lan Zhan was taken aback as he received the black bunny and placed it on his lap.

“Wei Ying...”

“I know-I know! I already gave you a new money pouch on the day of your birthday,” Wei Ying waved his hand to dismiss the small pout on Lan Zhan’s lips.

Since Lan Zhan’s fifth birthday, Wei Ying never missed giving Lan Zhan a gift. It is mostly his paintings but this year, he gave him a money pouch he personally made with the help of Liu Meiyue. He even bought the fabric with his own savings.

“But I also wanted to give them to you. I caught them when I was walking around the back hills three days ago. I helped them make a burrow there-“ he pointed the spot across to them where Lan Zhan saw two holes.

“And wanted to show them to you yesterday but you had to help shimu so I had to wait until you’re free.”

“Wei Ying... thank you,” Lan Zhan whispered as he softly patted the heads of the bunnies whose noses scrunched at his action.

Pet is forbidden is no longer a rule in Cloud Recesses. It became: *Pets are allowed as long as they do not cause disturbance and excessive noise.*

Most of the pets in Cloud Recesses are cats. Dogs are not really advised since the barks would sometimes cause too much noise. There are also songbirds that actually contributed to Gusu-Lan’s musical cultivation. The first three songbirds in Cloud Recesses were from Nie Huaisang that he gifted to Liu Meiyue after having Nie Mingyu’s help on catching them. Slowly, a canary was built for the songbirds in Cloud Recesses.

“We can leave them here in the back hills and visit them every day to feed and pet them!”

“Mn.”

“And I guess it’s my turn to remind you of what you said on my last birthday,” Wei Ying scrunched his nose. “There is no need for thank you and sorry between us.”

This made Lan Zhan’s ears turn pink as he nodded.

It is not just Wei Ying who was giving gifts. Lan Zhan gives him gifts too. They are mostly things he needed which Wei Ying values greatly until now. The first one was when Wei Ying turned six since Lan Zhan missed his fifth birthday as Wei Ying was not able to come to the Gentry House that month. Their mother said he got sick and had to stay in the medical pavilion.

On Wei Ying’s sixth birthday, he gave him a jade comb with a silver handle and red stones for its design. He went to Caiyi Town with his shufu and brother at that time. He saw the comb and asked their uncle if he could give it to Wei Ying. Their mother uses her comb for him. He saw how Wei Ying was looking at his and his brother’s comb that they hand their mother every time it was their turn for her to fix their hair before they leave.

Until now, Wei Ying uses the comb.

After that, he'd give him paints, brushes, papers, hair sticks, and more. It became a tradition for them to give each other a gift on their birthday.

Wei Ying pulled out two pieces of lettuce from his sleeve and handed them to Lan Zhan.

"Time to feed them!" Wei Ying said. Lan Zhan nodded but instead of taking the lettuce, he handed Wei Ying the white bunny and took one piece of lettuce.

"Wei Ying should help."

"Ah, of course, Lan Zhan," he snickered and they began feeding the bunnies.

They spent the entire afternoon in the back hills with Wei Ying talking about his day and Lan Zhan's occasional hums and responses. They left when the bunnies started hopping back to their burrows.

On their way, they met Lan Qijun and Xichen who were obviously taking a stroll.

"Wei Ying gave me bunnies," Lan Zhan said when his father asked where they came from.

"Oh, he did? Where are they now?" Qijun smiled as he eyed the two meaningfully.

"Back hills. Will visit them every day," he replied.

"I see. How many? Bunnies should have friends."

"Two!" Wei Ying raised his fingers as he smiled.

"That's lovely! Can I meet them tomorrow?" Xichen asked and the two immediately nodded. Even if Xichen is busy as a junior disciple, he still tries to spend time with them.

"Of course, Huan-gege! We should bring lettuce, they like it!"

"Mn."

"I see, I'll get some for them tomorrow before we go then."

Lan Qijun just smiled and nodded as he listened to the conversation of the three as they made their way to the Gentian House to join his wife for tea and snacks.

A week later, Lan Zhan and Wei Ying were surprised to see more bunnies in the back hills to accompany the two male bunnies that Wei Ying gifted Lan Zhan.

They did not ask where they came from. Wei Ying just giggled and returned to the kitchen to get more lettuce for their new friends while Lan Zhan sat down to accompany them. The bunnies immediately hopped towards him, nose scrunching to smell him.

Even if there were new bunny friends, Lan Zhan and Wei Ying could still identify Zhan-tuzi and Ying-tuzi as the white and black bunnies were always together even during feeding time.

(Tuzi- bunny)

Lan Zhan and Wei Ying had their naming and sword giving ceremony with the rest of the juniors their age.

Lan Zhan was bestowed with the courtesy name Wangji – *to not seek fame or wealth, forget about worldly matters, and be at peace with the world* .

Wei Ying was bestowed with the courtesy name Wuxian – *no envies* .

Lan Zhan's chosen instrument was a qin and he named it wangji-qin, much to his mother's amusement as she was the one who gave his courtesy name.

Wei Ying's chosen instrument was a dizi and he named it chenqing – *setting forth one's thoughts and explaining one's actions*.

Lan Zhan's sword was named Bichen – *to avoid dust/worldly matters*.

And to everyone's amusement, Wei Ying's sword was named Suibian – *whatever*.

Lan Qiren explained that his sword was a sword Wei Changze asked to be forged for his son. Lan Zhan, now Wangji does not know how his uncle knew about this but the sword was different from the common characteristics of Gusu-Lan's sword which is silver and white for the hilt and the scabbard.

Liu Meiyue gave Wei Ying, now called Wuxian, a silver tassel to put on his sword to signify that the sword belongs to Gusu-Lan too. It is a total contrast especially with the red engravings on the scabbard but it looks like it belongs there too. It carries red sword glare like Wei Wuxian's spiritual energy. Wangji's sword carries a blue sword glare.

Lan Wangji helped Wei Wuxian name his dizi but he asked Lan Qiren to name his sword.

"It's up to you shushu. Name it whatever – whatever you like!"

And Lan Qiren gave his brother, his sister-in-law, and two nephews a really good laugh when he presented the sword with *Suibian* engraved on its scabbard.

Wei Wuxian hugged Lan Qiren while laughing that caused tears in his eyes.

"You're not the only one with humor here, A-Ying," Lan Qiren said with a smile while hugging him back.

For their first night hunt, they joined the group of disciples in their class. They will be escorted by two senior disciples and sadly, Xichen was not allowed to come with them.

“I know you’d want to be there, A-Huan... but you have to let A-Zhan and A-Ying be a little independent on their first hunt,” Liu Meiyue said as she winked while she helped the two in fixing their supplies.

“We’ll show you our night hunt report, Huan-gege, right Lan Zhan?”

“Mn. Will show it to xiongzhang,” Wangji replied. Lan Wangji was required to call his brother formally like how their uncle calls their father. He and Xichen also address their parents as muqin and fuqin in public, but they stick to a-niang and a-die in private.

“Okay. Don’t forget your signals! I know Lan Qiang-shixiong is capable but just in case,” Lan Xichen pursed his lips which just made Liu Meiyue laugh.

“You two know the night hunting rules, right? Listen to your seniors and always stick together. Stay alert and be open-minded with everything,” she patted their heads.

“Yes a-niang.”

“Yes shimu.”

Lan Wangji does not tell Wei Wuxian when he saw the shadow of his brother and mother the moment they finished sealing the corpse they successfully killed for their first night hunt. He delivered the first blow and Wei Wuxian delivered the final blow.

They work wonderfully and fluidly together and would often receive compliments from their swordmaster. If they’re against each other, their duel matches, even when they were just still using practice swords, usually end with a draw. The opponent that would always be a challenge to the both of them is Lan Xichen who does not just train hard but has further experience by having to clash Shouyue, his sword to Nie Mingjue’s saber, Baxia for ‘friendly matches.’

They were welcomed with a hearty lunch prepared by his mother in Cloud Recesses the next day.

Wei Wuxian excitedly told them stories about the travel and the hunt after the meal and Wangji hummed and contributed some things that Wei Wuxian forgot to mention. He glanced at his mother and brother who kept a straight face but obviously had their own silent conversation. They witnessed everything after all.

It made Wangji smile.

“Aiyah, you enjoyed the stream too, right Lan Zhan? You’re smiling!”

“Mn.”

Then the archery competition in Qishan came.

Between Wangji's parents, it was Meiyue who was great with archery.

“I was a rogue cultivator. We had to trust different tools not just on night hunts but when hunting for our meals too.”

She showed them how it's done. The archery training of Gusu-Lan has thoroughly improved since the time she left seclusion. The archery master gave the furen of the sect liberty to assist in teaching the disciples, much to Liu Meiyue's delight.

Lan Xichen won the last two archery competitions held in Qishan.

This is the first time Wangji and Wuxian are joining.

“I'll win against you, Huan-gege!” Wei Wuxian excitedly said as he freely skips around the market in Nightless City. They were given free time before the opening ceremony so the three decided to go to the market and meet with Nie Mingjue for a meal.

Nie Huaisang did not come since he did not want to join. Instead, he was busy preparing for a play he wrote and was going to direct in Qinghe next season. Nie Mingyu was also busy assisting him. Lan Wangji and Wei Wuxian have also offered help on painting his set design.

“I look forward to it, A-Xian.”

Lan Xichen now calls Wangji his courtesy name while Wei Wuxian insisted to be called A-Xian instead.

“I like how it sounds, Huan-gege! Call me A-Xian, okay?”

“Whether you or I or Lan Zhan wins, it will still be a glory for Gusu-Lan so it's fine,” Wei Wuxian winked as he approached one stall and bought tanghulu. Xichen handed the payment using the money pouch that their father gave them because *“keep your money for yourselves. Here, use this for whatever you want to get while you're in the market.”*

If Liu Meiyue was there, she would have stopped him but since she stayed behind, Lan Qijun insisted and placed the pouch on his son's palm.

When they returned to the grounds for the opening ceremony, Lan Wangji realized they lost Xichen who was walking with Nie Mingjue, busy with a *deep* conversation between them.

“Ah, are we lost?” Wei Wuxian asked and it made Wangji look around.

“Why is Nightless City so complicated,” Wei Wuxian grumbled as they continued walking until they saw someone practicing. He signaled them to stop and put his finger on his lips. Lan Wangji stopped and nodded.

When the young disciple who seemed to be around their age made his shot and succeeded, Wei Wuxian clapped his hand and Wangji followed suit.

The Wen disciple flinched and immediately bowed.

“You’re a great archer, gongzi! That was a great shot!” Wei Wuxian said as they approached.

“Hi, th-thank you, gongzi.”

“Ah, this one is Wei Ying, courtesy name Wuxian.”

“Lan Zhan, courtesy name Wangji,” they both bowed.

“May we know gongzi’s name?”

“Ah... ah – W-Wen Ning courtesy – courtesy name Qionglin.”

“It is nice to meet you Wen-gongzi. You don’t sound well, are you nervous?” Wei Wuxian patted his shoulder. Wen Qionglin almost shied away from the touch but he was immediately comforted as he nodded.

“Ah, no need to be nervous, gongzi! We are all in the same age group here! You can call me Wei-xiong or Wuxian.”

“Ah.”

Wei Wuxian just grinned and patted his shoulder again.

“Are you joining later?”

He shyly nodded, “someone backed out last- last minute so... so they asked me to substitute.”

“Then I guess you’ll do very well later,” Wei Wuxian then pursed his lips. “But if you’re nervous... then we could shoot targets together later, what do you think, hm?” he batted his brows.

“Ah... I – I do not want – want to be a bother-“

“Not a bother! I’m inviting you, Wen-xiong... if that’s okay?”

“Ah... yes... Wei – Wei-xiong.”

“That’s right! Lan Zhan could be Ji-xiong! I’ll introduce you to Huan-gege and da-ge later!”

“Ah-“ Wen Qionglin scratched his nape.

“Xiongzhang and da-ge would like new friends.... Wen-xiong,” Lan Wangji offered.

Slowly, Wen Qionglin smiled and nodded.

Wen Qionglin guided them to the podium just outside the hunting grounds for the opening ceremony. Xichen immediately saw them and they approached. They greeted and introduced Wen Qionglin before he left to line up with the rest of the Wens.

Lan Wangji’s brows furrowed when he saw the position on the podium.

Even Wen Xu and Wen Chao sat on a higher platform than the rest of the leaders of the Great Sects.

“Is Wen-furen not around?” Wei Wuxian asked.

“She will be at the conference. We could give her the gifts a-niang asked us to hand over tomorrow,” Xichen replied and they both nodded. Meiyue asked them to hand over some handmade gifts she made for Wen Yu.

“But don’t you think that the position on stage... is quite off?”

Wei Wuxian’s question made the two pursed their lips and nodded while Nie Mingjue who heard them huffed.

When the competition started, they waited for Wen Qionglin to enter and they walked around as a trio because Nie Mingjue pulled Lan Xichen to have their own personal ‘competition’ (though Lan Wangji doubts this. Nie Mingjue never truly liked archery). It became a little competition between Lan Wangji and Wei Wuxian while they guided Wen Qionglin on what to do.

“This is our first time too but shimu trained us to be ready for this,” Wei Wuxian said when Wen Qionglin obviously looked like he wanted to ask if it was truly their first time with how well the two were doing.

Halfway through the competition, Wen Qionglin had to separate with them as they met a group of Wen disciples who asked him to join them. He was already doing well with shooting targets as well.

“They – they are part of my cohort so I should join them.”

“No problem! It was nice doing this with you Wen-xiong! We’ll meet you at the podium,” Wei Wuxian winked, which made Wen Qionglin blush as he scratched his nape.

“Thank you... for teaching me Wei-xiong, Ji-xiong.”

“Ah, no problem-no problem. See you around, Wen-xiong!”

“Mn. See you around... Wen-xiong.”

When the competition ended, Lan Wangji proudly looked at Wei Wuxian for receiving first place with only a two-point difference from him and Xichen. Was it Wangji's fault for missing to see those two targets while they walked around the forest or -- no one could really tell.

Jiang Fengmian, Yunmeng-Jiang's Sect Leader approached them when the ceremony ended. Beside him was Jiang Wanyin, his son.

“You are Wei Ying,” Jiang Fengmian said and for a moment, Wangji's eyes narrowed before he was able to mask his expression.

“Yes, Jiang-zongzhu. This one is Wei Ying, courtesy name Wuxian. Is there anything this disciple could do for you?”

Jiang Fengmian was smiling. His eyes showed emotions that Wangji cannot tell.

“Ah... Wei Ying...”

“Yes, Jiang-zongzhu?”

Jiang Fengmian shook his head, frowned a little, and then he shook his head again and smiled as he reached out and patted Wei Wuxian's shoulder.

“Congratulations on ranking first.”

“This one thanks Jiang-zongzhu.”

Jiang Fengmian looked like he was tempted to say something more but Lan Qijun arrived. They greeted him.

“Congratulations, A-Huan, A-Zhan, and A-Ying! I am so proud of you,” he patted their shoulders with a proud smile on his face.

“I see that Jiang-zongzhu met our jades,” Lan Qijun was obviously teasing them and it made the three bashfully look away while Jiang Wanyin was staring at them with a scowl on his face. When their eyes met, his expression made Wangji's brows twitch.

“I did... and --”

Lan Wangji noticed that there seemed to be a silent conversation between the two sect leaders.

“Ah... that. I'll tell you later, Jiang-zongzhu.”

“Thank you, Lan-zongzhu.”

“I’d like you to introduce my son too,” Jiang Fengmian changed the topic as he put his hand on his son’s back and he was obviously addressing Wei Wuxian. It made Wangji’s brows twitch again.

“Meet my son, Jiang Cheng.”

Wei Wuxian eyed the Lans first before he bowed, “This one is Wei Ying courtesy name Wuxian. It is nice to meet you, Jiang-gongzi.”

“Jiang Cheng, courtesy name Wanyin.”

Lan Wangji does not know why but even if he and Wei Wuxian always stick together most (all) of the time, he felt like sticking up with him even more especially when Jiang Fengmian often tried to approach them or would often look at them – look at Wei Wuxian.

He also saw the way Jiang Wanyin’s glare towards Wei Wuxian.

Before the conference ended, their father came to their guest quarters and asked for Wei Wuxian to accompany him.

Wei Wuxian returned with different emotions on his face that Lan Wangji had to decipher each of them. It does not seem like something was wrong but he kept on saying that he was looking forward to going home.

When they arrived in Cloud Recesses where Liu Meiyue and Lan Qiren were waiting for them, he suddenly flung himself and hugged Lan Qiren even in front of the other disciples. Lan Qiren readily caught him in his embrace.

“A-Ying-“

“Shushu, I met Jiang-zongzhu and he said he was my a-die’s friend,” Wei Wuxian said as he buried his face on Lan Qiren’s shoulder.

Wangji watched the silent conversation between his father and his uncle and then his uncle subtly nodded. He looked at their mother who had a soft smile on her face.

“Do you want to talk to me about it?” Lan Qiren asked and Wei Wuxian nodded as he broke the hug.

“Okay, let us go then.”

“Come for dinner in the Hanshi,” Liu Meiyue reminded them as she reached out to pat Wei Wuxian’s head.

They were long told that Wei Wuxian’s father once belonged to Yunmeng-Jiang but he left after getting married. Lan Wangji looked at his brother who also looked at him, both with

worried expressions on their faces.

"Don't worry. Your shufu will listen to whatever is bothering A-Ying after finally meeting his father's friend."

They both nodded as they offered their arms to their mother who stood between them and circled her arms on theirs. They continued entering Cloud Recesses while Qinghengjun silently followed behind his family while having a contented smile on his face. He also knows that his brother could handle the situation well.

When they arrived in the Hanshi, Wei Wuxian looked refreshed, smiling, and energized.

"Wei Ying?"

"Ah, Lan Zhan! I worried you and Huan-gege, right?"

Wangji did not reply.

"Nothing's wrong, I promise!" he raised three fingers and Lan Wangji chose to believe him. He knows that *his Wei Ying* will tell him one day if he thinks it is necessary.

They happily ate dinner in the Hanshi and Liu Meiyue had a good laugh when she learned the ranking for the archery competition.

A few weeks later, the 'Three Jades of Lan' was heard and it was retained in people's minds. Wei Wuxian does not stop blushing each time they are addressed that way.

"You're a Lan, A-Ying. Why are you so shy about it? Hm? Third Jade?"

Liu Meiyue truly enjoys teasing the three of them.

Then the ranking for the list of Young Masters was made.

Liu Meiyue was tearing up when she learned – tearing up while laughing.

"Believe me, this is just plain hilarious! Jin—Jin Guangshan? Really?" Gone is her calm and gentle demeanor as Madam Lan while she waved her hand, asking them to let her be.

"Your mother... must be remembering the – the list of grandmasters of – our generation," Lan Qiren's cheeks held a blush as he was not meeting their eyes.

Later, when the three of them tried to dig out information about the ranking of *their generation*, they figured out why.

Wen Rouhan ranked first. Lan Qijun and Lan Qiren held the second and third rank while Jin Guangshan got the fourth. Nainai, their source of information for this ranking, laughed.

“It was said that his father paid for his ranking too! I heard that they wanted him to be on the top three but... it would be too rigid if he could beat A-Ren both on cultivation and... looks,” Nainai continued to laugh and they cannot even chastise her for the ‘Gossip is Forbidden’ rule because they came to ask.

Lan Qijun is handsome, he has two very handsome sons. Lan Qiren is equally good looking too, especially when he decided not to grow his beard after little Wei Ying frowned and ran his palm on the growing hair.

“I don’t like it shushu. You look old with it!”

Lan Qiren huffed but shaved it and showed up in dinner looking young and fresh once more and it made little Wei Ying squeal and recited poetry of how handsome his shushu is.

“But of course! Only Shifu could beat shushu! Of course, my a-die too!”

“Ah, as far as I could remember, rumors said that he could have ranked high, on the top five even, only if he was part of a gentry family. He was considered the late Jiang-zongzhu’s ward but it did not give much backing to his name. He still ranked eighth, only falling short for gentry but did well on the other criteria.”

Wei Wuxian beamed at this and even Lan Wangji and Lan Xichen nodded in agreement. After all, they both saw the portrait their uncle drew for the young Wei Ying to know or hopefully remember how his a-die and a-niang look like.

Wei Changze was a handsome man and they could see that Wei Wuxian was slowly looking like him too. The cunning resemblance and Cangse Sanren’s unique features are present on his face as what their mother pointed out before.

“You are slowly looking so much like your father, A-Ying. Cangse is there too but you got more of her personality. A wonderful mix if you ask me.”

She would pat Wei Wuxian’s head and it would make him smile that could rival the sun.

He truly likes it when they talk to him about his parents since he really couldn’t recall anything because of the fever. As he grows older, they often doubt if he’ll ever remember anything at this point.

“Your mother probably found it amusing because... like father... like son. Now we’ll have to see if Jin-gongzi does something similar in the years to come. Ah, Jins and their gold.”

“Nainai...” Xichen looked amused at her expression but it made Wei Wuxian laugh.

“Nainai never leaves Cloud Recesses but she knows a lot.”

“You’ll be surprised by the things that I know, A-Ying.”

“That sounds scary.”

Nainai just laughed.

For someone who was rumored to be living for centuries and had her records removed so people will just address her as Elder Nainai or Nainai... that line surely sounded scary. Truly, nainai *knows* a lot of things.

Lan Wangji likes learning with Wei Wuxian. He is a genius. He listens well, throws in questions and ideas, asks things that would sometimes make others frown but Gusu-Lan teachers indulge with him and it often results in a piece of new or common knowledge. If the lecturers cannot answer, the question or discussion reaches Lan Qiren or Lan Qijun. If they fail, Liu Meiyue is there.

They built their cores together. They perfected reading, calligraphy, learned arts, music, and sword forms together. They flew and fell from learning how to fly their swords together. They basically did and experienced everything together.

Lan Wangji feels inspired to learn with him, not just in the classroom but with practical experience. They learned the sword forms well, they move like they are dancing yet they know how to deliver blows towards each other. Wei Wuxian would have new attacks that Lan Wangji would not anticipate, he’ll deliver with strength and stamina in return.

He likes spending every little time he has with Wei Wuxian that is outside training, classes, and cultivation. Wei Wuxian has his own responsibility in the sect as much as Wangji does. He learns sect, politics, and how things work alongside his brother. Wei Wuxian was assigned with things that he truly likes and at the end of the day, the two of them would spend time with the bunnies, talk about their day and then head back to the Hanshi for dinner with their family.

He likes learning music and playing duets with him - wangji-qin and chenqing-dizi produce a wonderful sound together. In the silence of his alone time, he focuses on playing a song he wishes to play to him one day. A song that he made *only for him* .

Wei Wuxian is his equal with cultivation and every single thing in their life. His xiongzhang would often tease him on this and that would make Wangji huff, ears red, lips pursed into

something almost like a pout.

Wangji acknowledges the meaning behind his brother's words.

He knows that Wei Wuxian knows this too.

They share an *understanding* .

It is something that they do not skirt around because their actions *show* it. People around them know, they noticed of course, but they respect the choice of the two with how they deal with the *understanding* between them.

One of the rules that were given consideration was the seventh rule, *Disturbing female cultivators is prohibited*. Ever since Lan Qijun left seclusion, it was one of the rules he modified – *Disturbing and unlawful acts towards female cultivators is prohibited*. The initial rule included the separation of training and lessons of the Gusu-Lan disciples. Now, they are allowed to be in one class, even with sword and cultivation training. Quarters are still separated but they are now allowed to interact instead of the usual division.

This means that Lan Wangji and Wei Wuxian get to share classes with them too.

“Wei-gongzi, I brought this from Caiyi and I know how much you like this snack,” Lan Lian said as she handed the snack to Wei Wuxian right after their sword training.

“Aiyah, Lian-jiejie is kind. Thank you,” Wei Wuxian received it and Lan Lian giggled and excused herself.

Lan Wangji stared.

“Let's share this, Lan Zhan!” Wei Wuxian faced him but Lan Wangji just looked at it.

“Wei Ying can eat it by himself.”

Wei Wuxian's lips hung open as he blinked, pausing halfway through opening the wrapper.

“Eh?”

But Lan Wangji just walked past him to leave the training grounds. Wei Wuxian skipped his way to follow him.

“Lan Zhan!”

Lan Wangji glanced at him and when their eyes met, there was a small smirk on Wei Wuxian's smile that just made Wangji huff and continue walking.

“Aiyah! Lian-jiejie is kind enough to get me the snack. How could I say no, hm? Wasting food is forbidden.”

Wangji did not give any reply and he could hear him snicker until he felt a tug on his sleeves.

“Aiyo! I smell vinegar somewhere here, Lan Zhan. Can you smell it too?”

His expression instantly made Lan Wangji’s face darken, ears turning a deeper shade of red as he doubled his pace while Wei Wuxian began laughing out loud, obviously testing the limits of Excessive noise is forbidden rule.

Liu Meiyue who happened to pass by and heard the entire exchange from the training grounds until this path snickered as she shook her head.

‘Ah, kids. Wait for a little more until we settle the set up with A-Huan, yes?’

She is surely telling her husband and brother-in-law about this.

They *all* know that the two have an *understanding* of what they *truly have* between them. They know that they are still young and could take their time but Liu Meiyue could tell that her A-Ying likes to test her A-Zhan's limits with all his teasing.

After all, she smelled the vinegar too.

Alcohol is forbidden *except for special occasions within Cloud Recesses*.

This rule has served the sect better. Lans are still bad drunks as proven in history but at least, they could now serve the famed Emperor’s Smile to visitors if needed.

And of course, Liu Meiyue made sure to allow her boys to have a taste of it too.

“Now, A-Zhan, A-Ying,” she chuckled as she could see the anticipation in Wei Wuxian’s eyes and curiosity in her son’s expression.

“I have warded the surrounding areas of Gentian House so the two of you, especially A-Zhan would not... dare to go somewhere, yes?”

Lan Wangji’s ears instantly turned pink.

At sixteen, Liu Meiyue thought it was fitting for them to have their first taste of alcohol despite Lan Qiren’s disapproval as she received a fond yes from her husband.

When Xichen turned 16 and before the guest lecture began for the year, Liu Meiyue had her son taste alcohol and it was something that she will never forget.

Hearing a wonderful duet of a qin by her husband and a drunk but expert playing of xiao by her son was something she engraved in her memory.

Her A-Huan... was a *loud* drunk. She had to accompany him on her roof as he played joyful melodies while talking about everything freely. His voice even went a note higher when speaking. He was giggling at almost everything.

“A-niang! Did you know that Mingjue-xiong asked me to drink but I told him that if I drink, the first one will be Emperor’s Smile! We’ll drink it here when he arrives for lectures! Shh! Do not tell shufu.”

“Yes, A-Huan. You’ve said it several times in the past fifteen minutes already and now, I don’t think I’ll allow that to happen without a group of chaperones to follow you around. You planned to sneak out didn’t you?”

Her A-Huan just blushed all over the face, giggled, and then returned the xiao on his lips and played another joyful melody.

“Then I’ll play Clarity to Mingjue-xiong and have him soak in the Cold Spring.”

“You’ve been doing that for years, A-Huan.”

“Oh, I do?”

“Yes, sweetheart. With or without a chaperone, much to your shufu’s stress.”

“Oh! Oh!” Xichen’s delightful laughter echoed around the wards as he stood up and offered a hand for her to stand too.

“A-niang, dance with me!”

“Without music?”

“There’s music, a-niang! Shh! Can’t you hear it?”

Liu Meiyue pursed her lips and slowly, she heard the sound of the qin. When she looked down to her porch, her husband was already playing a song on his qin, amused expression on his face. She did not even hear him enter the wards.

She danced with her son on the rooftop and later, Xichen accompanied his father’s playing with his xiao.

“Now, we’ll start with one cup and see how it goes, yes?”

Wei Wuxian eagerly nodded while Wangji looked skeptical.

“Tell me how it tastes on your tongue, okay?”

After filling three cups, Liu Meiyue raised her cup for a toast. The liquid caused a hot sensation in her throat. She saw how Wei Wuxian beamed after swallowing the entire content of the cup.

Then they heard a thud.

“LAN ZHAN!”

Liu Meiyue chuckled as she shook her head.

“Like his father then,” she said as she took the cup from her son’s hand while Wei Wuxian was close to panicking.

“He’ll wake in a few and let’s see how it goes,” she looked amused while Wei Wuxian still looked worried. “Now, how does it taste?”

“Err...” Wei Wuxian pursed his lips.

“Ah, you can tell me if you want more A-Ying. I don’t think you’re a lightweight,” she handed him the bottle and Wei Wuxian poured another cup.

“Will he really be okay?”

“Yes. Lans are *bad* drunks. I did not ask Xichen to come and allowed him to go and lead a hunt since he had no idea to what extent he did when he was drunk. It would be fun when these two drink together one day and-“

“No one will look after them, shimu!”

“You and Mingjue are there.”

Liu Meiyue always knows what to make the teenager blush. Wei Wuxian drank another cup.

They were on their fifth cup when Wangji began groaning.

“Lan Zhan?”

Slowly, he lifted his head from the table and opened his eyes, half-lidded.

Liu Meiyue pulled her lips in as she watched her son try to familiarize everything around him, anticipation bubbling inside her.

Lan Wangji blinked. He looked to his right and saw *his Wei Ying* and when he looked in front of him, his a-niang was also there.

He tried to find any recollection of why was he in the Gentian House but when he could not think of anything, he pouted.

“Lan Zhan?”

“Wei Ying?”

“Yeah. How do you feel?”

He shook his head and continued to pout. He watched as *his Wei Ying* began to move but when he realized that he was going to stand, he was quick enough to hold his wrist.

“No!”

“Eh? Lan Zhan, I’m getting you some water.”

“No!” he shook his head, pout still visible on his face. He heard his a-niang laugh.

“I’ll get it,” she said. Wangji nodded his head to his mother and smiled. His a-niang smiled back and she stood up. *His Wei Ying* was about to protest but Wangji held his wrist tighter.

“Stay.”

“Ah, Lan Zhan, of course, I’ll stay. I’m just-“

“Here. Drink some water, A-Zhan,” his a-niang handed him a cup and he took it from her. Wangji stared at the cup in his hand, his brows furrowing.

What was he going to do with it again?

“Lan Zhan?”

He slowly turned his head to face *his Wei Ying* and then back to the cup. Carefully, he lifted it higher and made it touch *his Wei Ying*’s lips which made his Wei Ying flinch.

“Eh? It is for you, Lan Zhan! Drink it.” *His Wei Ying* guided the cup to his lips and Wangji felt the coldness of the liquid touch his lips. He liked it. He has been feeling warm in his throat and stomach since he opened his eyes earlier.

“Is it weird that I am finding this amusing but worrying at the same time?” he heard *his Wei Ying* ask his a-niang who chuckled and shook her head. Lan Wangji wanted to ask what they were talking about but the cup was still against his lips.

“Here, Lan Zhan, drink it,” his Wei Ying lifted the cup higher and tilted it on his lips, the liquid slowly poured inside his mouth. Wangji liked how cold it was. He felt some of it spilled at the corner of his lips but *his Wei Ying* moved to wipe it with his sleeves.

“Aiyah, look at you, spilling water in front of your mother!” *His Wei Ying*’s words made him pout as he faced his mother who laughed.

“Seems like my A-Zhan needs to learn how to drink water again.”

Wangji shook his head and pouted. He decided that he could show his a-niang that he knows how to drink water! But instead, his a-niang took the cup from his hands and placed it on the table.

“Now A-Zhan, tell me how you feel,” his a-niang said and he knows that he needs to answer since his a-niang asked but he could not find the right words to say.

“Here, how does it feel here, Lan Zhan?” When *his Wei Ying* suddenly touched his throat, Wangji almost flinched and he suddenly felt his ears warm.

“Warm,” he uttered.

“Ah, how about here?” and *his Wei Ying* touched his abdomen. It was just a feather touch as he was able to catch his other wrist and now, he’s holding them both.

“Warm,” he uttered again. He felt something happen all over his body that he does not understand.

“It’s natural right, shimu?”

“Yes. That’s the effect of alcohol but it will pass.”

Alcohol? Wangji looked at the table again and read the bottle’s label. *Emperor’s Smile*.

His pout deepened.

“A-niang and Wei Ying broke rules.”

He saw *his Wei Ying* gape but his a-niang chuckled.

“But there is an occasion today, A-Zhan.”

That made his brows furrow. He cannot remember any conferences, or important visitors, or birthdays, or –

“Today is the day that A-Zhan and A-Ying are to taste alcohol for the first time,” his a-niang suddenly said. His brows twitched a little as he met her eyes. His a-niang is very beautiful. The most beautiful woman in Wangji’s life. He got lost staring at her eyes.

"A-niang is beautiful."

He felt happy to see his a-niang laugh then she shook her head.

"My A-Zhan thinks he could flutter me."

"Not flutter. Love a-niang."

"And I love you too, sweetheart. You and A-Ying."

"Mn." He nodded and looked at *his Wei Ying* who was also smiling. Wangji looked at his a-niang again until he felt *his Wei Ying* tug his wrists away from him.

"Lan Zhan, I'd like to drink so can you like-"

"No. Mine." He shook his head.

He saw *his Wei Ying's* eyes widen and he knew that this was his look of surprise.

Did Wangji say anything wrong?

"Ah, can you like.... Let my hand go? Your... your-" *his Wei Ying* looked at him and their eyes met. Wangji felt something weird again and his ears felt warmer.

"Your ribbon is crooked!"

That made Wangji flinch as he instantly let go of *his Wei Ying's* wrists to touch his ribbon.

"Crooked?!"

He saw *his Wei Ying* glance at his a-niang before looking at him again. He saw mischief pass his expression before he masked it with a pout that mirrored his.

"Want me to fix it?" *his Wei Ying* asked. Wangji tilted his head. His a-niang is there but – but *Wei Ying* has fixed his ribbon a lot of times now, especially when they were practicing on how to tie it on their own when they were seven and were advised to dress all by themselves from head to toe.

Slowly, Wangji moved closer to *his Wei Ying*, their faces inches apart as he met *his Wei Ying's* eyes. If he moves any closer, he could probably feel *his Wei Ying's* lashes on his skin like how his breath brushes against his face now.

His heart felt weird, weirder than his body as he saw *his Wei Ying's* face turn red.

He moved back a little as he raised his hand to touch *his Wei Ying's* forehead, including his ribbon.

"Lan Zhan?"

"Sick?"

"Ah? No-no, I'm not sick." *His Wei Ying* removed his hand. Wangji moved his face closer again.

His ribbon felt weird on his forehead so he tried to look up, his brows raised when he did it making the ribbon move once more.

"Mn."

Slowly, *his Wei Ying* raised his hands to fix his ribbon. He felt *his Wei Ying's* warm hands touch his forehead and it made Wangji smile as he hummed.

“There, done. Is it good, shimu?”

“Yes, very nice and even, A-Ying.”

Wangji proudly smiled as he faced his a-niang to show him his ribbon that *his Wei Ying* fixed.

When *his Wei Ying* moved, Wangji quickly held his wrist to make sure he stays.

“Oh? I’m not going though. I’m just filling my cup.” There was an amused expression on *his Wei Ying's* face that made Wangji wonder why.

He was starting to lose focus as he was beginning to feel dizzy.

He pouted at the discomfort.

“Is there something wrong, A-Zhan?” his a-niang asked. He shook his head but it caused him to get dizzier.

“Dizzy,” he mumbled.

“Does A-Zhan want to go to bed and rest?” his a-niang asked. He wanted to say yes. He wanted to lie down and close his eyes as perhaps, the dizziness will leave. He looked out the window and figured that it was almost sleeping time too.

But then he glanced at *his Wei Ying* and figured that he might not be sleeping yet. They both moved to the junior disciples’ dorm after their ceremony.

Wangji shares a room with his xiongzhang again while *his Wei Ying* used the room alone until the following year where one of their shidis, Xue-shidi moved in.

He and *his Wei Ying* would always go back to the junior disciples’ dorm together and he would walk him to his room before he heads to the room he shares with his xiongzhang.

“No, a-niang,” he shook his head slowly to avoid getting dizzier.

“But you look like you want it, Lan Zhan.”

“Wei Ying is not going back yet,” he pouted and it made *his Wei Ying* laugh.

“Ah, but we are not going back to the dorms today? We’re sleeping here, remember?” he pointed at the sleeping mats across them. He tilted his head as he tried to recall but only made him feel dizzier again.

“No. Don’t remember,” then he looked at his a-niang for answers because a-niang has all the answers that even his a-die or his shufu cannot give.

“Yes, A-Zhan. You two are sleeping here tonight. Your a-die and I will sleep in my room too. Your xiongzhong is out for a night hunt.”

His face scrunched a little as he tried to process everything his a-niang said.

He stayed quiet then.

“A-Ying, tell me about your latest invention.”

“Eh? But Lan Zhan...” *his Wei Ying* looked at him.

“He’ll be fine there, right A-Zhan?”

“Mn,” he slowly nodded, hand still holding *his Wei Ying’s* wrist.

“Okay,” *his Wei Ying* drank another cup and filled it up again.

“Ah, shimu! You see, I have been thinking about making a talisman that could –“

Wangji could not understand or process half (all) of what *his Wei Ying* was saying.

He was fine sitting there but he realized that *his Wei Ying* and a-niang were not paying attention to him anymore. They were too focused on their conversation.

His pout deepened once more. When his brows furrowed, he felt his forehead ribbon move. Instead of fixing it, he reached to his back and pulled the knot in one go.

“Lan Zhan!”

“Mn.”

He looked at his a-niang who seemed to be waiting in anticipation of what he’ll do next. Wangji tilted his head as he looked down at the ribbon on his hand. Then he looked at his other hand that was holding *his Wei Ying’s* wrist.

“Lan Zhan, no! What are you – Shimu help! What-“

“Mn.”

“I think that A-Zhan is just-” he heard his a-niang laugh, unable to finish her sentence.

“But shimu!”

“Mn.”

Wangji bit his lower lip as he tried his best to focus on wrapping his ribbon on *his Wei Ying’s* wrist and then he wrapped the other end on his. He raised their wrists together to see if it was to his satisfaction. He could hear *his Wei Ying* making some incoherent noise but he was too focused on what he was doing.

“What does A-Zhan want to do next?” his a-niang asked.

“Oh, no-no-no! Shushu will skin me alive! Drunk or not! Shimu! Why are you laughing?!”

Wangji smiled when he was satisfied that the knot won't be easily removed as he hummed. He then eyed his a-niang.

“A-niang... Wangji would like--mpph?” his eyes widened when he could not open his lips.

He knows what this is but at the same time, he does not know what it's called. His mind is too fuzzy to think of the spell and how to remove it.

He looked at his a-niang, not accusingly but for inquiry, his a-niang shrugged her shoulders, amusement still seen on her face. Then *his Wei Ying* chugged whatever was the content of the bottle in front of him. Wangji watched the liquid flow down the corner of *his Wei Ying's* lips down to his jaw. He found himself swallowing hard before he reached out to wipe it with his sleeves.

“I can't believe you're letting him do this, shimu!” he heard him say. “Shushu will have him do a handstand and copy the rules hundreds of times!”

His a-niang just laughed and drank the content of her cup.

“A-Zhan is satisfied with that for now, right?”

Wangji wanted to say no, he wanted to shake his head but he seemed to forget how to do both. His lips are still sealed. He finally remembered what this is called, *Silencing Spell*.

He pouted instead.

His lips are too used to being sealed even without the spell unless he is talking to his family so he let it be and listened to them.

“You and I both know that you both are just waiting for who will do that first... and look at you blushing! -- It's not like you two have not been touching each other's ribbon since you were young and knew what it meant.”

“Shimu! I – I – what if we bowed?!”

“Then you finished one bow already--”

“Oh, heavens! You really love teasing us and I could imagine shushu huffing and puffing if he's here, turning all red and purple!”

“That is why Qiren is not allowed to join and ruin the fun!”

“Shimu!”

Wangji blinked as he could not process the conversation going on in front of him. Instead, he looked down to their bound wrist and he smiled, okay, he's *satisfied... for now*.

His eyelids were getting as heavy as his head. Wangji felt himself swaying and slowly, he leaned to his right where the side of his face landed on a sturdy *something* and warm fabric. He nuzzled his cheek on the fabric and hummed in contentment as he closed his eyes, inhaling the familiar scent of freshwater.

“Aiyah, look at you, Lan Zhan. Sleeping before us, huh?” He felt the *something* move a little, almost vibrating when he heard the voice so he snuggled closer.

“He’s a quieter drunk, I guess, very much like his father right there. As long as you’re there and he could hold you, he’s fine staying still.”

“Oh. Is Shifu like that? – aiyah, you’re blushing shimu!”

“Here, let me pour you your last cup-“

“But-“

“But your Shifu is coming over and he’ll realize that he won’t have a qin duet with A-Zhan in his drunken state so we should move him to the sleeping mat now and remove that.”

Rustle. Rustle.

“Your Shifu is still quite traditional and would want his son to offer you proper courtship when you’re at the right age, after all.”

“Shimu!”

“A-Ying, your blush could rival the red stones on the comb A-Zhan gave-“

“Shimu! He – he won’t get up anymore?”

“Look at you changing the topic.”

Laughter.

“I don’t think so. They normally sleep once it reaches their sleeping schedule.”

“Okay.”

“I think that you could really handle him when he’s drunk and when you are and he’s not... I think you’ll be in good hands.”

“Shimu!”

“Ah, A-Ying –“

Wangji’s consciousness fully slipped away as he allowed the comfort of the arm around his shoulder and the soft caress on his face to lull him to sleep.

Wangji woke up with a headache and his mother holding an amused expression on her face as she patted his head. His ribbon and other hair ornaments were at the side of his pillow and he was still wearing his disciple robes from yesterday.

“What-“

“Nothing, Lan Zhan! Let’s go back and change to join the morning training! Let’s go-let’s go!”

“Wei Ying-“

“See you for breakfast Shifu, shimu!”

“Wei-“

And Lan Wangji was dragged by Wei Wuxian while holding his wrist... his wrist... that felt weird but he does not understand why.

Then they all prepared for the upcoming lectures where Lan Qiren asked them to join the guest disciples.

“It is good to set a good example to the young disciples your age like how Xichen did three years ago.”

The guest quarters were prepared, the wards were strengthened, the patrol schedules were adjusted, and the list of lectures was finished.

On the first day of the scheduled arrival of the guests, Wangji and Wei Wuxian were out on a night hunt. On their way back with a concerning incident that must be brought up to their Sect Leader, they were welcomed by the sight of guest disciples in a variety of purple-colored robes at the entrance arc.

"As part of Gusu-Lan rules, everyone coming for the lecture is not allowed in without an invitation."

"I've told you a thousand times, we accidentally got our invitations lost! We never intended to lose it. What's more, all of us are standing here, what can we lie to you about?"

"Gongzi, without invitation, I can't identify you people."

"Look, the sun is about to set! You can't just watch us sleeping out on the streets, can you? Who are you to talk to us this way? I am the Heir of Yunmeng-Jiang and she is my sister. Why are you letting us stay out longer than the rest? We saw the previous group enter immediately!"

"A-Cheng."

"No, a-jie. Why can't you excuse us on this?! What about this? Please go fetch your Sect Leader so he could confirm our identity then!"

"The previous group had their invitation with them, gongzi."

"And? Call your Sect Leader then."

"Qinghengjun is currently in an important meeting. Please wait for a moment until we change shifts when it's 17:45 so I can fetch him."

"What the--"

"A-Cheng, behave yourself."

"But a-jie--"

"As a-die instructed, no matter when, we can't forget our manners. Let's leave the gate and plan for the next step."

"Lan Zhan, I think we should go," Wei Wuxian elbowed Wangji who just nodded and led the way, Wuxian falling in-step beside him. Wei Wuxian already signaled the other disciples with them to enter the Cloud Recesses using another entrance to avoid the guests seeing what they have.

Their arrival called the attention of the disciples present.

"Ming-xiong, Nuan-xiong, what is going on?"

"Wei-gongzi, Lan-er-gongzi, welcome back," the two disciples greeted them.

When Lan Wangji and Wei Wuxian faced the guest disciples from Yunmeng-Jiang, they were welcomed by Jiang Wanyin scowling at them.

"What is the trouble about?" Lan Wangji asked.

"Lan-er-gongzi--"

"Lan-er-gongzi, I am Jiang Cheng, courtesy name Wanyin. This is my sister, Jiang Yanli. We met during the Discussion Conference in Qishan."

Wangji nodded, his jaw clenching when he noticed the way Jiang Wanyin gave Wei Wuxian a quick side glare before he returned his attention to him.

Jiang Yanli also introduced herself which made Lan Wangji and Wei Wuxian respectfully greet her back.

“Lan-er-gongzi, we accidentally lost our invitation. It's getting late and inconvenient to sleep outside. Now that you are here, you can confirm our identity to him,” Jiang Wanyin pointed at Xiao Ming.

Wangji pursed his lips to hide his gritted teeth. He still noticed how Jiang Wanyin has not acknowledged Wei Wuxian's presence.

“No invitation, no entry,” Wei Wuxian suddenly said.

“What?! I was talking to Lan-er-gongzi-“

“As Lan Zhan is the Master of Discipline in Cloud Recesses, I am the one Head of Patrol and Safety of our perimeters, of Cloud Recesses. We provided the invitation with special incantations for the sects to enter the Cloud Recesses until the guest disciples are provided with their guest disciple robes to signify their identity.”

“We are exhausted from traveling and we made it before sunset. You cannot just turn us down for a paper?! Don't you think that's a little rigid?!”

“A-Cheng-“

“As I have said, Jiang-gongzi, it was an invitation with special incantations. It was not *just a paper*.” Wangji watched as Wei Wuxian looked a bit offended by how Jiang Wanyin called the invitations he had been working hard for. He immediately masked it with a neutral expression. It was first used three years ago and received compliments for how effective and handy it was. It helped organize things too.

Jiang Wanyin's frown went deeper and Lan Wangji could see how he was gripping his scabbard tighter.

“No invitation, no entry,” Lan Wangji repeated what Wei Wuxian said.

“It was an accident. We never intended to lose it! If this was Lotus Pier, you could enter even without your invitation because we could make exceptions. How could you do this to us?!”

Wangji could tell that he was close to throwing tantrums and he had to take a deep breath to control himself from reciting the rules the Jiang Sect Heir broke before he could even enter Cloud Recesses.

“Arrogance is forbidden. Do not be haughty and complacent. Do not take advantage of your position to oppress others. Be careful with your words. Value your belongings. Be respectful and humble.”

Lan Wangji watched Wei Wuxian recite some of the rules.

“Those were some of the rules that you have broken before you could step foot inside Cloud Recesses. The book of our 500 rules was sent together with the invitation with the intention of having the guest disciples familiarize the important rules applied in our everyday life in Cloud Recesses,” Wei Wuxian continued.

Jiang Wanyin’s breathing was becoming rigid as he was fuming, his entire face turning red.

“Find it and come back.”

Wei Wuxian’s voice was final and Lan Wangji knew he’ll say the same thing if Wei Wuxian did not say it.

Before Jiang Wanyin could open his lips, Jiang Yanli bowed.

“I apologize for my didi’s words. We are tired and have lost control of our words and actions. Please forgive the rudeness and we will return once we have the invitation. Please accept my apology on behalf of my brother and Yunmeng-Jiang.”

Jiang Wanyin looked like he was about to protest but the rest of the disciples who came with them bowed as well so he had no choice but to do the same.

Lan Wangji glanced at Wei Wuxian who nodded and they bowed back.

“Apologies accepted, Jiang-guniang. I hope you’d understand that we have certain safety practices in our respective sects. We only value our home’s safety as much as you value yours.”

“You are too kind. Thank you and I understand, Wei-gongzi.”

This time, Wei Wuxian laughed to lighten the mood and waved his hand, “Thank you for understanding us as well.”

“A-jie-“

“A-Cheng, stop it,” it sounded like a warning for Lan Wangji and Wei Wuxian’s ears.

When the group was about to leave, Lan Wangji thought that Wei Wuxian would ask him to enter already but he suddenly said something that he did not expect.

“Jiang-gongzi.”

Jiang Wanyin turned to look at him.

“This is Cloud Recesses, not Lotus Pier. Here, we don’t make exceptions especially when it comes to safety and security. I hope you’ll understand that.”

Jiang Wanyin rolled his eyes and scoffed as he followed his sister who tugged his sleeve before he could say anything.

While they were walking up the stairs, Lan Wangji waited for Wei Wuxian to speak.

“Lan Zhan, you know that I’m going to Shifu and talk to him about allowing them to enter, right?”

“Mn. I know.”

“I was just pissed off with the way Jiang-gongzi acted.”

“He did not acknowledge Wei Ying.”

Wei Wuxian scoffed.

“You know I do not care about that, right? For now,” he waved his hand. “He seemed... odd, cold? Since we were introduced in Qishan,” Wei Wuxian shrugged his shoulders. “It seems like Jiang-gongzi will need some serious... *disciplining*. I think we found shushu’s favorite student for this batch.”

“Wei Ying.”

“What? Aiyah, Lan Zhan! It’s not like he could cause shushu to qi deviate. He’s at least two decades younger to be capable of doing that.”

“Let’s just go to Shifu and call shimu and shushu to show them what happened to one of our outer disciples.”

“Mn.”

Yet Lan Wangji was still thinking about Jiang Wanyin and his rude behavior as well as his attitude, especially towards Wei Wuxian. The lectures have not started yet but Lan Wangji thinks... that it would not be as peaceful as the other guest lectures they witnessed.

Chapter End Notes

I think I dropped things here and there 🤔 😊 Topics that need to be discussed will be shown in the future chapters. There will be answers on things, I promise.


Oh and I am glad that a lot of you liked the Madam's tea party, there will still be one 😊

Lan Qiren and Wei Wuxian being like the father and son with all those hugs and fondness? Yes. (and Lan Qiren without a beard, yes!)

Lan Wangji having his a-niang and everyone special in his life without experiencing the snowy nights? Huhu, A-Zhan deserves it.

Lan Xichen and Nie Mingjue doing things people their age are doing instead of doing sect things? Yes!

Nie Huaisang directing his own play? Director Nie will serve!
Lastly, Wei Wuxian using silencing spell to Lan Wangji? I had to!

Thank you once more, be safe, and have a nice day 

Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

Hello!

Finally posting an update~

Apologies for the delay. The main reason for this is the fact that I have been finishing the remaining parts of this story. Initially, we only had 2 more long chapters left but after I reread the parts that I finished, I realize that it would be too tiring to read them in one chapter without a pause. It is not just because of the word count but the scenes were... *tiring*. I know you understand what I mean. hehe.

So after thorough consideration, I decided to add 3 more chapters so it won't be too tiring to read. I hope you understand.

Thank you for reading, commenting, and leaving kudos to this fic, I appreciate it alot 

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The opening ceremony happened a day after all the guest disciples had settled.

Every sect was expected to present a gift to Gusu-Lan for accepting their disciples for lectures.

Lan Wangji and Wei Wuxian stayed in front of each group. Wangji on the left, Wuxian on the right. Things were running smoothly until it was Qinghe-Nie's turn. Nie Huaisang beamed as he moved forward with Meng Yao, his brother's deputy who came with him for the opening ceremony.

Lan Wangji glanced at Wei Wuxian who had his lips pursed the moment some guests started gossiping. Wei Wuxian's eyes narrowed as those disciples choked on the air the moment their lips were sealed. Lan Wangji glanced at him again and Wei Wuxian shrugged his shoulders.

The ceremony continued.

Jiang Wanyin presented the gift of Yunmeng-Jiang. Lan Wangji stared at him before he focused in front. His father was seated in the center with his mother and uncle on each side. His brother stood beside their mother.

While the ceremony was going on, one of the patrols on duty came and met Wei Wuxian's eyes and then went to whisper something to Lan Xichen. Of course, it called the attention of a lot of people inside the room but no one interrupted the ceremony.

Wei Wuxian, Lan Xichen, and Liu Meiyue subtly left the Lanshi.

When they returned, Wen Qing, Wen Qionglin, and three Dafan-Wens disciples entered and presented their gifts last.

Everyone was surprised to see Wen disciples join the lectures this year. Truly, when they said that this batch was promising, they weren't lying.

When they exited the Lanshi after the ceremony, Wei Wuxian and Lan Wangji came out together.

"You should have seen his face, Lan Zhan! He was so angry that his fire did not work against Ming-xiong! I'm so happy that the array worked!" Wei Wuxian excitedly said. It started as a talisman he was working on inside the library, then he presented it to Qinghengjun. It worked and after more research and prototypes, it became an array sewn on the robes of every Gusu-Lan disciple.

"Mn. Wei Ying's invention is amazing."

"Aiyah! Lan Zhan!"

"Mn."

They shared a knowing smile and then they stopped when they saw Meng Yao loitering around.

"Deputy Meng!" Wei Wuxian called and the two of them greeted him. Meng Yao did the same.

They met him in Unclean Realm a few years ago. He was found by Nie Mingyu in Yunping while she was traveling. She took him in when she learned that he was trying to learn cultivation. He rose in ranks and became the deputy of Nie Mingjue's disciples.

Of course, they also know who his father is. Nie Mingyu asked him if he wanted to meet his father but refused, "for now" but he will, "one day."

All details are courtesy of Nie Huaisang when a simple question of "who is he?" Came from Wei Wuxian when they first saw Meng Yao from afar.

"Is there something wrong? Are you looking for Nie-xiong?"

"Ah, no, Wei-gongzi. I already bade goodbye to Nie-er-gongzi. I came to say farewell and thank you to Zewujun."

"Huan-gege?"

"Mn... for... protecting me earlier."

"Protecting you?" Wei Wuxian's brows furrowed as he looked at Lan Wangji but the latter shook his head once.

“Yes, Wei-gongzi. I... heard of what the others were saying. I knew... he helped.”

Wei Wuxian was not able to stop himself from raising his brow and then he nodded.

“Ah, that-“

“Wei-xiong, Ji-xiong! I finally found you!” Nie Huaisang came to them, almost skipping as he stopped beside Meng Yao.

“Wei-xiong! It was you, wasn’t it? The silencing spell? No one would dare to use that around Lan-laoshi and Qinghengjun and act like nothing happened except for you!” Nie Huaisang snickered as he pointed his fan towards him.

Wei Wuxian awkwardly smiled as he looked at Meng Yao who seemed to understand what Nie Huaisang said.

“Wei-gongzi-“

He shook his head and waved his hand.

“No problem-no problem. It does not matter if it was me, Huan-gege, or Lan Zhan. It was only right to shut them up-“

“Wei-gongzi, my apologies! Please forgive me for assuming. I just thought... Zewujun said... I –“

Wei Wuxian chuckled as he stopped Meng Yao from bowing.

“It’s alright. It does not matter. Perhaps, Huan-gege would do the same but I just did it first. You don’t have to apologize.”

Meng Yao’s face was pale as he nodded.

Nie Huaisang’s brows furrowed as he looked at Lan Wangji who remained silent.

Then Meng Yao thanked Wei Wuxian and bade goodbye to the three young masters.

“Don’t tell me he thought that it was Xichen-ge?”

Wei Wuxian did not reply but Lan Wangji hummed. Nie Huaisang snickered.

“Ah, it’s probably because Xichen-ge welcomed us in the guest quarters and said that he promised da-ge that he won’t allow anyone to talk bad about Yao-ge. You know how da-ge is with his deputy since he also promised mama that he’ll look after him.”

Nie Huaisang always sounds fond when he addresses Nie Mingyu as his mama. He was not able to meet his mother who died during childbirth. The first mother figure he had was her and so he shyly called her that way one day and it made Nie Mingyu cry. Since then, he has called him mama.

“I see. Some people really need to stop themselves from involving in others' business,” Wei Wuxian clicked his tongue.

“Anyway! I told you I’ll introduce you to Wen-xiong, right? They’re probably settling down in the guest quarters that Huan-gege assigned for them. We should go and offer help, what do you think, Lan Zhan?”

“Mn.”

“Okay, let’s go!”

Things were flowing smoothly with the guest lectures. Every year, there are changes in the way the lectures are presented and done. It usually depends on the batch scheduled to come over and the set of teachers who will handle the lectures and practical learning.

Lan Qiren is the head lecturer for this year and he always makes sure that he can monitor all his students in class.

Lan Wangji listens well with his back straight and eyes in front but he cannot help but glance at Wei Wuxian at the other side of the room. He was doing the same but it is obvious that the papers in front of him are filled with scribbles, definitely not his notes from the class. This made Lan Wangji bite back a smile. This is one of the reasons why Wei Wuxian usually gets punished when caught. He does not focus on class when the lecturer has repeated their lessons a couple of times.

He wonders if their uncle will catch him.

Not.

Lan Wangji's brow raised when he saw Lan Qiren huff, eyes on the group of people behind Wei Wuxian.

Yunmeng-Jiang Sect.

Jiang Wanyin was glaring at Wei Wuxian’s back and despite looking like he was listening, it is obvious that his focus was not in the class at all.

“Jiang-gongzi,” Lan Qiren called. It made Jiang Wanyin stand up.

“Lan-laoshi.”

Lan Wangji listened with interest. Since the start of the lectures, all of them have been on their feet with how teachers, especially Lan Qiren, call someone for recitation randomly.

“Based on our discussion, let me ask you,” Lan Qiren cleared his throat. “Are imps, demons, ghosts, and monsters the same thing?”

“No.”

“Why not? How are they differentiated?”

Jiang Wanyin wet his lips, hands gripped on both sides as he swallowed hard. All eyes were on him.

“Imps are formed from living, non-human beings...” He does not often get picked on random recitations by teachers in Lotus Pier. No one would even dare to do so. It is always the other disciples, not their da-shixiong.

“Continue, Jiang-gongzi,” Lan Qiren encouraged, almost demanded, depending on how you would want to interpret it.

Jiang Wanyin closed his eyes to recall everything he memorized in class.

“Demons are formed from living humans. Ghosts are formed from dead humans. Monsters are formed from dead, non-human beings.”

Lan Qiren nodded approvingly and Jiang Wanyin almost smiled and sat down when he spoke again.

“Imps and monsters are often confused,” Lan Qiren stroked his beard that he was *finally* allowed to grow because:

"A-Ying, even if my cultivation delays my ageing, I still need to remind myself of my age."

And with a pout, Wei Ying nodded.

"But if its ugly, we're getting rid of it, alright, shushu?"

“Give me an example.”

Jiang Wanyin’s mind jumbled while trying to recall examples given in class. He listens and studies well but he has always been considered the best in their class. The head disciple, the Sect Heir... so testing his knowledge like this was *not needed*. He is someone *capable*.

Jiang Wanyin wet his lips again and then he cleared his throat. The more that he tried to think, the pressure was rising inside him and his mind was going blank. He is well aware that everyone’s eyes are on him as well... including Wei Wuxian.

“Wuxian, give me an example.”

Jiang Wanyin’s brows twitched, eyes widening as he looked at Lan Qiren.

The Lanshi was filled with expecting murmurs before they turned quiet as Wei Wuxian stood up.

“For example,” Wei Wuxian smiled, eyes twinkling. “If that tree behind Lan-laoshi is tainted by a certain energy and is cultivated into a conscious being that causes trouble, it would be an imp. If I take an ax and cut it in the middle so only a dead stump is left, and then it cultivates into a being, it would be a monster.”

“Indeed, Lan-laoshi’s prized ward. How amazing!”

“Aiyah! How could he think so quickly? I was still trying to think it out!”

“Look, he’s even smiling, heavens!”

Jiang Wanyin gripped his hands tighter.

“Good, you may take your seat.”

“Thank you, Lan-laoshi,” Wei Wuxian nodded and sat down.

Lan Qiren returned his attention to Jiang Wanyin.

“Does Jiang-gongzi have other examples to give?”

Jiang Wanyin managed to meet his sister’s eyes who shook her head.

“None, Lan-laoshi.”

“You may take your seat.”

“Thank you, Lan-laoshi,” he reluctantly sat down, nape burning with the way he imagined people around looking at him.

“Wangji, what was the profession of the ancestors of the Nie Clan?”

“They were butchers.”

“Wuxian, the symbol of the Jin Sect, is a white peony. What type of white peony is it?”

“Sparks Amidst Snow.”

“Wangji, the Jiang Sect ancestors were known for being?”

“Rangers who advocate frank actions and unrestrained minds.”

“Wuxian, who was the first in the cultivation world to focus on the rise of his clan rather than his sect?”

“The ancestry of the Wen Clan, Wen Mao.”

Everyone was amazed at the way Lan Qiren threw the questions and how quick Lan Wangji and Wei Wuxian answered him. It almost seemed like they were not blinking with how fast they answered.

Lan Qiren hummed approvingly stroking his beard as he looked around.

“Cultivators are expected to have a quick mind and fast response to everything. Aside from fighting and using one’s sword and spiritual energy, cultivators are not without intelligence and fast wit to think and resolve the case they are dealing with,” his eyes lingered on Jiang Wanyin before returning it to the center aisle.

“Now, anyone who could answer will receive 20 merit points for the first exam at the end of the week,” Lan Qiren paused as people who began to slouch even sat straight.

“There was an executioner with parents, a wife, and children, but he executed more than a hundred people. Then he died in public, and his body was left alone for a week. With the repressed energy of resentment, he started to haunt and kill.” Lan Qiren said, “What should be done?”

Silence echoed around the room, everyone was starting to subtly flip pages of their book when Lan Qiren raised his voice, “Don’t open your books! Think about this on your own!”

Jiang Wanyin grabbed the opportunity to raise his hand.

“Jiang-gongzi,” Lan Qiren nodded his head in acknowledgment as Jiang Wanyin stood up.

It was obvious that he was trying to make up for what happened earlier.

“As he executed more than a hundred people before his death and started to haunt and kill after his death, he should be killed. Exterminate so he won’t cause further harm,” he said it with his shoulders squared and with so much confidence, emitting the Purple Spider’s aura around him.

Murmurs were heard, most of them were in agreement.

“The dead are not to be disrespected,” the voice caused Jiang Wanyin’s brows to furrow as Wei Wuxian turned around from his seat to face him.

Lan Qiren watched in interest though he cannot hide his disappointment and disapproval with Jiang Wanyin’s answer.

“What do you mean?” Jiang Wanyin raised his brow.

“There are three ways to deal with the situation,” Wei Wuxian said as he stood up, eyes determined. “First, liberate. Second, suppress. Third, eliminate. First, try to move him to his family and grant his dying wish, setting him free from his own obsessiveness. If it fails, suppress it. If he is guilty, and his hatred does not decrease, exterminate him completely.”

Jiang Wanyin’s entire face turned red as a scowl was forming on his face. He could suddenly hear the voice of Jiang Hao-laoshi, one of the teachers in Lotus Pier saying the exact things in

his head. He clenched his jaw.

“There are three ways. The cultivation world should stick to this order of measures. No errors should be allowed,” Lan Wangji added.

“But-“ Wei Wuxian smiled. “Although liberation comes first, it is often impossible. To grant his dying wish sounds simple. It would be easy if the wish was for a new piece of clothing,” he pulled his lips to the side as if he was thinking.

Wangji looked at him expectedly.

“But what if the wish was to kill lots of people in revenge?”

The question he raised earned murmurs from the students.

“That is why suppression is after liberation. *If necessary*, elimination would also follow,” Wei Wuxian looked around to answer the question he raised.

Lan Wangji tried not to huff as he focused in front, knowing that Wei Wuxian would not add anything after that.

“Exactly,” Lan Qiren nodded.

“No matter what they did, the situation must be considered first. That is why we do information gathering. We do not jump to elimination. If we do, what is the point of having us cultivators learn how to deal with them properly?” he paused and looked at Jiang Wanyin.

“I do not mean disrespect, Jiang-gongzi. It is truly just the standard, three ways that everyone learns in cultivation studies. It always depends on the situation, on the case. We help ghosts – spirits to pass so they could join the reincarnation cycle. Exterminating them immediately can cause one’s soul to break and never join the cycle. Think about it, Jiang-gongzi.” and he sat down.

Jiang Wanyin swallowed hard, his breathing became shallow as anger formed at the pit of his stomach.

Just then, the sound of the gong was heard, the classes ended.

Lan Qiren hummed and dismissed the class after reminding them of the examination at the end of the week.

Jiang Wanyin was seething in anger as he was not even able to sit down. Just as he was about to take a step, a hand grabbed his wrist and he saw his sister hold him back.

“A-Cheng, no.”

“A-jie.”

“No. Let’s go out, you need some air.”

“A-jie-“

But Jiang Yanli already pulled him out and he chose not to resist as he could feel how hard his sister's grip on his wrist was.

Wei Wuxian approached Lan Wangji's table as they stood up. Nie Huaisang followed them, chirpier as ever as he started talking about 'group study' in the library for the examination.

They bowed to Lan Qiren who finished fixing his things and nodded his head. Lan Qiren's eyes lingered on the figures of the Yunmeng-Jiang sect who exited first and then back to his ward and nephew. He took a deep breath and left the Lanshi.

“By the way! You were so cool earlier, Wei-xiong!”

Wei Wuxian chuckled as he scratched his nape.

“It had to be done, Nie-xiong. A lot were agreeing to the thought. I could imagine shimu facepalming if she was here.”

Lan Wangji hummed in agreement. When the three ways were first discussed with them, Wei Wuxian had *some ideas* he asked Liu Meiyue after class. His mother would indulge and listen to everything he says and they would discuss it thoroughly. His mother may share a lot of *bizarre* ideas with Wei Wuxian but she never let those ideas leave the walls of the Gentian House. She always makes Wei Wuxian promise that the reason why they are discussing it is because of the price to pay if he ever tries it.

“Ah, shimu! Why would I leave the wide and wonderful path in front of me and walk a single plank bridge? No thank you.”

As they made their way out, despite the *Gossip is Forbidden* being one of the rules, guest disciples wearing robes that were carrying their sect's emblems did not stop talking about what happened inside the Lanshi.

“I know that shushu *always* randomly asks students in class for recitation but why do you think he called out Jiang-gongzi?” Wei Wuxian asked Lan Wangji as they made their way to the library to supervise punishment on a few guest disciples who broke the rules and that includes Nie Huaisang that is why he was with them.

He was caught with his spring books during the random inspections by senior disciples. It was confiscated and sent back to Qinghe. He could imagine his brother storming in Cloud Recesses soon... to *reprimand* him and of course, see the great Zewujun who was busy with sect duties. Nie Huaisang thinks that he did his brother a favor. Even his baba and mama would thank him for it.

“Was not listening to class.”

“Oh? So you were not concentrating in class for you to notice that, Lan Zhan,” he playfully elbowed him but Lan Wangji just looked at him with a neutral expression on his face.

“Wei Ying was not listening too.”

“I do not know what you are talking about, Lan Zhan.”

Nie Huaisang snickered, getting too used to being the *third-wheel* ever since they became friends when they were 11 years old.

“I’ll ask Wen-xiong to join us during the group study!”

“You ask permission from his sister. Wen-guniang is scary,” Wei Wuxian replied and it made Nie Huaisang snap his fan close.

“Ah... yeah...” his lips pursed and Wei Wuxian just laughed.

Lan Wangji settled himself into following them behind. They met a few disciples who were to get their punishments too and one look from Lan Wangji made them stop gossiping and followed them. They created three columned lines as they orderly walked on the path to the library.

“Ah, look at that laogong. Don’t they look like adorable ducklings?” Liu Meiyue chuckled as they watched them from a corner.

“A-Zhan and A-Ying seemed to be enjoying these lectures.”

“They do. They always have a lot of stories when they join me in the Gentian House for tea.”

“Ah... I wish I could join you more.”

Liu Meiyue laughed as she circled her hand on her husband’s arm. They resumed walking.

“We understand the severity of the current case happening in the borders of Biling Lake. Are you sure that you do not need my help?”

“As much as I like night hunting with you, laopo, your and A-Ying’s talismans and arrays are helping us with what we are doing. The ghouls are not going to enter any of Gusu's barriers.”

Liu Meiyue clicked her tongue.

“Qishan-Wen...”

“Mn.”

She sighed.

“If only we discussed politics during those tea parties.”

This made Lan Qijun laugh as he patted his wife's hand around his arm.

“Treat those tea parties as you, meeting your friends and not for politics. That's what you told me, right?”

“Meeting friends...” Liu Meiyue almost huffed but she just pursed her lips as she shook her head.

Friends.

The face of the woman in purple who looked like she was silently judging them each time they meet entered her mind.

Yes, right... friends.

Lan Wangji should have expected this to happen and yet his brows still twitched when Jiang Wanyin blocked their way right after the morning warm-up in the training ground was finished.

“Duel with me, Wei Wuxian,” Jiang Wanyin said.

It surprised everyone as Jiang Wanyin horizontally raised his sword between him and Wei Wuxian to block the latter from walking forward.

“Breakfast gong is in fifteen minutes. Classes start in an hour,” Wei Wuxian replied, his white robes flowing beautifully as his forehead ribbon shines under the bright sun that blessed them for their morning warm-up.

People were starting to gather around them.

“Unsupervised sparring is forbidden. Fighting without permission is forbidden. Raising one's tool against a fellow disciple without a proper reason is forbidden,” Wei Wuxian recited the rules that Jiang Wanyin obviously heard when Lan Qiren recited it on the first day of class, seen on the wall of discipline, seen on the book of rules, and copied for his punishment when he was caught sneaking out past curfew to *secretly* spar with his er-shidi.

“Why can we only practice during sword training and free time? Improving one's cultivation is much needed and that is through training – physically and not just through theory!”

“The things discussed during lectures are applied through physical training, Jiang-gongzi. If we only focus on physical training such as sword fighting and combat, how will we know when we should use it?”

Jiang Wanyin did not reply.

“You’ll have to copy the rules of conduct three hundred times under Lan-er-gongzi’s supervision. Meet him in the library after class.”

“You-“

Jiang Wanyin unsheathed his sword and attacked. Before Lan Wangji could intervene, Wei Wuxian pushed him back and deflected Jiang Wanyin’s attack with Suibian’s scabbard. He only pushed him back using enough arm strength he gained from all the handstands he had to do both for training, meditation, and punishment but it was enough to have Jiang Wanyin almost fall back.

He was able to find his bearing before he could hit the ground.

With gritted teeth, Jiang Wanyin attacked again but Wei Wuxian dodged and sidestepped. He did it a few times which obviously frustrated the Jiang Sect Heir. As Jiang Wanyin raised his sword, Suibian’s scabbard crossed with Sandu’s blade. It created a strong impact that a light purple glare was seen but Wei Wuxian just pushed him back again and this time, Jiang Wanyin fell down, Sandu dropping on the ground.

It only lasted for a minute.

And people realized that Wei Wuxian used one hand, his other hand was on his back.

“Arrogance is forbidden. Do not be haughty. Do not act impulsively. Be respectful and humble,” Wei Wuxian’s eyes narrowed as he moved forward while Jiang Wanyin looked up to him, glaring.

“Do not hold grudges.” And with that, Wei Wuxian held his arm and pulled him up without listening to his rants.

Lan Wangji looked at the people around them.

“Dismiss.” Everyone scurried away though their eyes were looking at Wei Wuxian and Jiang Wanyin’s figures that were walking in the direction of the Discipline Hall.

“... if you think that you could look down on me for mmphh mpphhh mpphhh!!!” Jiang Wanyin’s lips were sealed and he has been using his strength to pull away from Wei Wuxian’s hold but his grip was too tight that he is sure it’ll leave a mark.

Jiang Wanyin’s entire face was turning red.

The only times he knelt in their Ancestral Hall was when his mother reprimanded him. Even the mistakes of their disciples were not shouldered by him, the Head Disciple so despite all the words and additional training his mother gives him, she rarely gives him the punishment of kneeling in their Ancestral Hall. It is always additional lapses for swimming or running or additional hours in the training field.

Wei Wuxian knelt down and he pulled Jiang Wanyin to kneel beside him. Jiang Wanyin tried to force his mouth open only for it to open immediately, creating a loud noise but Wei Wuxian did not look at him.

Lan Wangji was angry. The discipline committee came out as he followed the two to the Discipline Hall. He arrived when Wei Wuxian was enumerating the rules they broke.

Wei Wuxian must not be punished. He was attacked unprovoked.

“Lan-er-gongzi,” he was called.

“You led the morning warm-up and meditation today. You were there. Can you enumerate to us what happened?”

And Lan Wangji recited everything in proper order without adding or missing a detail.

Lan Wangji saw Jiang Wanyin frown.

“Given the weight of the rules broken, Wei-gongzi is to copy rules fifty times in handstand,” the committee announced.

“Jiang-gongzi is to receive discipline paddle a hundred times.”

“What?!”

“Jiang-gongzi?”

“Why am I going to be paddled when he-“ he pointed his hilt to Wei Wuxian but the committee member cleared his throat.

“Wei-gongzi defended himself with his sword sheathed while Jiang-gongzi’s sword could have injured someone. It was unsupervised and given that it happened without the presence of a senior, the end result could have caused a greater problem not just to those who were involved but to Gusu-Lan Sect and our lectures.”

Jiang Wanyin gritted his teeth when the disciple came out with the discipline paddle. He glared at Wei Wuxian and Lan Wangji.

His mother would never allow this!

"Do not ruin the face of the sect! Do not embarrass us and do not allow others to intimidate and be any higher against you! Show them what Yunmeng-Jiang is capable of!"

He could hear her voice in his head as he straightened his posture the moment the paddle hit his back.

Later that afternoon, Lan Wangji took a deep breath as he handed Wei Wuxian the medicating oil for him to use for his tired muscles after finishing his punishment for the day. He will need to spend a few days to finish the punishment as copying rules on handstand is still a gruesome task.

Wei Wuxian massaged his shoulders and arms. Despite getting used to it, it is still tiring to do handstands and writing at the same time. He also had his mouth closed the whole time with the ends of his ribbon kept between his lips to prevent it from touching the ground.

“Wei Ying,” the concern in Lan Wangji’s voice was palpable but it only made Wei Wuxian laugh as he elbowed him.

“Why do you think I did not unsheathe Suibian?”

“Wei Ying.”

“Jiang-gongzi is not worth it. Let’s hope he learned his lessons and if not, then may Lan An bless me with more patience. I don’t know why he is picking on me. Was it the invitation? Or was it because of what happened in shushu’s class?”

“Wei Ying-“

Lan Wangji was cut off when a figure in white with nine-petal lotus embroidered on her shoulder sleeves approached them.

She bowed.

“Wei-gongzi, Lan-er-gongzi.”

“Jiang-guniang,” they bowed back.

Jiang Yanli rose to meet their eyes and then she bowed once more.

“I came to apologize on behalf of my brother. He has been under so much stress lately. Adjusting our lives and practices that are completely different from Cloud Recesses was taking a toll on him. Rest assured that I have talked to him and he would not do it again.”

Wei Wuxian took a deep breath as he glanced at Lan Wangji before looking at Jiang Yanli once more.

He smiled.

“Jiang-guniang,” he called and Yanli rose from her bow.

“As long as he does not do it again.”

Yet he did.

It was in Liu Meiyue's advanced talisman class. This is one of the classes that Lan Wangji likes the most. It is not just because it is with his mother but it shows how his mother likes what she is doing. It is also her favorite bonding time with Wei Wuxian and they would pull him and Lan Xichen to join.

His mother, as a rogue cultivator, has developed countless talisman inventions before she even met his father, and with Wei Wuxian's intelligence, they have either improved them or created more. The talisman supplies of Gusu-Lan have become abundant ever since they began inventing when Wei Wuxian turned 13.

Aside from joining the guest disciples for the lectures, the two of them were often asked to be the assistant of their teachers when needed. This time, Liu Meiyue asked Wei Wuxian to join and assist her in her demonstration. They always choose a couple of new talisman inventions to share with guest disciples that they may share with their respective sects when the lectures are over.

They have distributed papers with the drawing of the talismans that will be taught to the disciples. They have moved to the training field for a wider space and to prevent unnecessary accidents inside the classroom.

One moment, Lan Wangji was busy admiring his a-niang and *his Wei Ying* demonstrating in front of the disciples and the next thing he saw was a talisman floating on the air that could have gone haywire if Liu Meiyue was not fast enough to deflect it, burning the talisman on the ground.

Everyone's gasps and surprised expressions were heard.

"Who was it?!" Liu Meiyue's voice was hard as she looked around.

Just then, they saw a few disciples looking at Jiang Wanyin.

Lan Wangji's gripped his scabbard as he made his way to Jiang Wanyin.

"What did you do?" Lan Wangji asked, voice clipped.

Jiang Wanyin looked shaken as he looked at his palm but he recovered immediately to click his tongue.

"That talisman was called binding, why did it float that way?"

The binding talisman was introduced as Wei Wuxian's invention.

"That was not binding talisman, Jiang-gongzi," Liu Meiyue moved forward.

"That was disorientation talisman... which should have not been put on a talisman paper yet," Liu Meiyue looked at the paper on Jiang Wanyin's hand.

“If activated correctly, it could have caused everyone within three meters to be disoriented for a minute. If used incorrectly, it could have caused the fire because the basis of the disorientation was smoke and dust,” Liu Meiyue’s voice sounded disappointed.

“I have not authorized to try out that talisman yet. It is set to be taught to everyone last as it needs concentration and attention to detail. The characters were just given to everyone to familiarize first. We were demonstrating the binding talisman in the center,” she pursed her lips. “If Jiang-gongzi noticed.”

It was a subtle way of calling him out for not concentrating in class. Jiang Wanyin wet his lips as he tried not to glare at the Madam of the Lan Sect. His eyes landed at Wei Wuxian who stood behind Liu Mieyue.

“And that talisman is my and Wuxian’s invention.”

“Unauthorized use of tools in class is forbidden. Do not move arbitrarily. Do not harbor doubts and jealousy-“

“I am not jealous!”

“Honor your teacher and respect his teaching. Do not be unreasonable. Do not disregard laws and rules. Do not cause harm to your fellow disciples. Do not disrupt the class.”

The corners of Lan Wangji’s eyes hardened as he moved forward to hold Jiang Wanyin’s arm.

“Come with me to the Discipline Hall for your punishment.”

Jiang Wanyin received the discipline paddle as punishment once more. What he did was under the third-degree punishment of Gusu-Lan where he almost caused harm to his fellow disciples.

Liu Meiyue waited for the punishment to conclude before she approached Jiang Wanyin who was still trying to walk with his back straight as he left the Discipline Hall.

“Jiang-gongzi.”

“Lan-furen,” he tried to bow but Liu Meiyue stopped him.

“I understand that you would want to take a rest now but could I walk with you to your guest quarters so we could talk?”

Jiang Wanyin did not meet his eyes but he nodded.

Liu Meiyue smiled and signaled for him to lead the way.

“I heard that this is the second time you were paddled.”

Jiang Wanyin pursed his lips.

“May I ask the reason why you did it earlier?”

Jiang Wanyin did not reply, one hand holding his sword and the other hand gripping his robe to steady himself.

“Do you know why you were punished both times?”

“I broke the rules.”

“Yes, you did. Do you know why you were punished?”

This made Jiang Wanyin frown as he turned to look at her as if asking if she knew what she was saying. This made Liu Meiyue smile.

“Punishments are not just given randomly and just because one broke the rules though of course, it is needed.”

“When you break a rule or do not do well, you get punished. That’s the standard.”

“I may agree on that but I also do not.”

Jiang Wanyin looked at her with furrowed brows.

“Punishments are given for three reasons.”

Jiang Wanyin waited.

“First is because one broke the rule.”

Jiang Wanyin knows this.

“Second is because it aims for one to repent, to reflect and not repeat one’s action – one’s mistake.”

Jiang Wanyin did not react.

“Lastly, it is to remind one why the rules are there anyway.”

“It is to follow -- keep the order.”

“And for Gusu-Lan, it is to follow the way to righteousness, to a righteous living.”

“We attempt the impossible in Yunmeng-Jiang.”

“That, I heard... but that does not mean that you do not have things to follow to keep order. You do not just attempt the impossible without a reason.”

Jiang Wanyin remembers Zidian and his mother’s voice. Both, he aims to learn and own one day but not too soon.

“We have.”

“Then what does Jiang-gongzi think of punishments?”

“They discipline and make one not repeat it again.”

“Mn. Does Jiang-gongzi apply this in his daily life too?”

Jiang Wanyin’s lips twitched.

“Of course, I do, Lan-furen.”

“I see. I hope that Jiang-gongzi does not see punishment as something done out of spite. We have a set of rules given to the Discipline Committee for them to follow and base the punishment they give.”

“Why does Lan-furen tell me this?”

“Because Jiang-gongzi has been punished twice using the third-degree punishment of the sect. Even if the sects were informed of the punishments their disciples may receive when they come here for lectures, we would still want the guest disciples to know the reasons behind things.”

“I understand it already, Lan-furen,” this is the first time that someone explains to him thoroughly like this and he does not wish to listen anymore. It is giving him ghost bumps.

“I see. Then I hope that Jiang-gongzi will heal well and I will see you in class.”

“I will, thank you, Lan-furen.”

And while Liu Meiyue was walking to accompany Lan Wangji and Wei Wuxian on their way to the library, Jiang Yanli approached them. Once again, Jiang Yanli apologized on behalf of her brother.

“He is repenting and will try his best to discipline himself. I ask for your understanding.”

When she left, Wei Wuxian took a deep breath but he almost rolled his eyes if Liu Meiyue was not looking at him sternly.

“I know shimu, I know. I said it is fine, you said it is fine but I just can't help it!” he exasperatedly sighed.

“What is it?”

“I don’t remember apologizing and cleaning up the younger sibling’s mess being the elder sibling’s official role.”

“A-Ying.”

“It’s quite frustrating. Jiang-gongzi is frustrating.”

“Why do you say so?”

“This is the third time that Jiang-guniang apologized on his behalf. I’ll bury myself alive if Huan-gege ever apologizes on my behalf if I was wrong.”

“A-Ying... you and Jiang-gongzi... are different.”

“I know...”

“You are raised differently, grew in a different place, environment... and it must be hard for Jiang-gongzi to adjust as what his sister said.”

Wei Wuxian pouted and tried not to let them hear whatever he was muttering.

It made Lan Wangji frown.

“Jiang-gongzi came to study. That should be his priority.”

“Ah, you are both going to get burned out if you stress over things like this. Let the teachers handle the disciples, okay? It is your free day tomorrow, why not go down to Caiyi, hm?”

Lan Wangji looked at Wei Wuxian, waiting for his decision and it made Wei Wuxian beam.

“We should go, Lan Zhan!”

“Mn. Will accompany Wei Ying.”

Liu Meiyue laughed as she patted both of their backs.

Truly, she wonders what they could do for the other disciples that needed more attention... whether because of their cultivation or because of... other things.

Jiang Wanyin seemed to be a little... *different*. His attitude reminds her so much of Yu Ziyuan and the things she hears about him cannot help her but feel like... Yu Ziyuan made her son grow up like her.

She does not know if the world could handle another Yu Ziyuan.

The thought made her shake her head.

On their free day, Lan Wangji and Wei Wuxian came to Caiyi Town like they usually do. Wei Wuxian jumps from one stall to another, charming and talking to the owners and sellers. Lan Wangji just silently followed him.

“Jin-gongzi,” Wei Wuxian bowed when they found Jin Zixuan seated outside a tea house.

“Wei-gongzi, Lan-er-gongzi,” Jin Zixuan bowed as well, hand holding a leash.

“Oh, is that your dog?” Wei Wuxian asked as he stooped down and took a peek at the dog hiding under the table.

Jin Zixuan blushed and nodded.

“Yes.”

“May I?” Wei Wuxian inquired and Jin Zixuan nodded again.

“Little Gold, come out,” he instructed and Wei Wuxian snickered.

“You named him... Little Gold?”

Despite the blush on his face, Jin Zixuan’s brows furrowed.

“What is wrong with Little Gold?”

“Nothing-nothing. Forgive me,” Wei Wuxian waved his hand as he tried to hold back his snicker. Slowly, Little Gold came out from his hiding place and immediately allowed Wei Wuxian to pet his head.

“Oh, you’re a chubby little one, aren’t you?” he chuckled as he let his fingers touch the fluffy hair and skin of the spiritual dog.

“Lan Zhan, come meet Little Gold,” he still tried to hold back his snicker when he said the name but Lan Wangji also stooped down beside him and petted the dog.

“You have someone looking after him here?” Wei Wuxian asked.

“Yes. Little Gold is a good and quiet dog but he does not do well in a new environment. I do not wish to cause noise in the guest quarters,” Jin Zixuan replied and Wei Wuxian nodded in understanding. He eyed the treats on the table and when Jin Zixuan saw it, he nodded. Wei Wuxian beamed and picked out one and showed it to Little Gold whose tail wagged immediately.

“Cute!”

Lan Wangji stood up when Wei Wuxian did the same. Jin Zixuan unconsciously moved to the side and allowed Wei Wuxian to sit.

“He knows tricks too,” Jin Zixuan proudly said.

“Little Gold, sit! Good boy!” and Wei Wuxian fed him.

Lan Wangji watched Wei Wuxian shine brightly while making the spiritual dog do simple tricks... though he cannot help but notice the way Jin Zixuan blushed each time Wei Wuxian glanced at him when Little Gold does a good trick. Lan Wangji’s back stiffened.

“Your dog is so cute! Shimu will surely want to meet him!”

“Ah, Lan-furen met him when she came to Koi Tower for the tea invitation of my mother.”

“Oh, right! I bet she does this too!” and Wei Wuxian was close to smothering Little Gold but it surprisingly made Jin Zixuan laugh as he nodded.

“Oh, so the Young Master Jin also laughs?” Wei Wuxian raised his brow, obviously teasing but it made Jin Zixuan turn redder.

“You are way too serious in lectures, Jin-gongzi. Loosen up, there’s no competition here.”

“Is there none...” Jin Zixuan muttered but it made Wei Wuxian smile as he stood up.

“There’s none, right Lan Zhan?”

“Mn.”

“I’ll try,” Jin Zixuan replied as he watched Wei Wuxian stand beside Lan Wangji. He almost looked disappointed that the two were going to leave already. He *instructed* his disciples to leave him alone for now but the company of the two is welcomed.

“Does Little Gold have other friends?”

“Yes! We train spiritual dogs in Koi Tower. Perhaps... you... and Lan-er-gongzi could come there next time.”

“Is that an invitation, Jin-gongzi?” Wei Wuxian inquired and Jin Zixuan felt his cheek blush as he nodded.

“Good. We’re coming, right Lan Zhan?”

“Mn.”

“Jin Zixuan.”

The three turned to look where the familiar voice came. They saw Jiang Wanyin frowning.

“Jiang Wanyin,” Jin Zixuan stood up.

“Why did you send that letter to a-jie and let her wait for you the whole morning while you are here with – with –” he glared at Lan Wangji and Wei Wuxian.

“I sent what?! What are you even saying, Jiang Wanyin?!”

“You sent her a letter, inviting her to go to Caiyi!”

“I did not? Why would I?!”

“Because she is your betrothed, you dumbass!”

“Jiang Wanyin!”

“Jin Zixuan!”

Wei Wuxian glanced at Lan Wangji as they took a step back to not be caught in the center of the argument.

“Is it more enjoyable to talk to these two that you even blush-“

“JIANG WANYIN!” Jin Zixuan pushed him when he approached, hand tightening on his scabbard, Jiang Wanyin doing the same.

“I advise you two not to continue whatever you are thinking and settle this-“

“You are not involved in this so shut up!”

“Jiang Wanyin! You are talking to me so why are you involving others?!” Jin Zixuan’s frown deepened while Jiang Wanyin rolled his eyes.

Wei Wuxian raised his brow.

“I do not wish to involve myself, Jiang-gongzi. All I am saying is that you are both wearing your disciple robes with your Sect emblem embroidered in it.”

That caught Jiang Wanyin’s attention as he swallowed hard.

“Go see my sister, you moron,” he gritted his teeth as he looked at Jin Zixuan.

“I did not send any letters.”

“Then tell her.”

“Jiang Wanyin!”

“Jin-gongzi, Jiang-gongzi! My apologies for interrupting,” their attention was taken by Huang Liyuan, one of the female disciples in Jin Zixuan’s cohort.

“What is it, A-Yuan?”

“I... was the one who left the letter as instructed by Jin-furen. I was about to tell Jin-gongzi but he was gone when we checked his quarters. We had to look for him since he was not responding to butterfly messages. My apologies for the misunderstanding,” she bowed and it made both Jin Zixuan and Jiang Wanyin turn red.

Wei Wuxian signaled Lan Wangji that it was time for them to leave. They did not bother telling them and just slowly took a few steps back and left. Wei Wuxian made sure to wave at Little Gold who was looking at them with interest but thankfully, did not bark or make any sound to announce their departure.

Lan Wangji gave one last glance to the small group before he followed Wei Wuxian on another stall.

So it was not just him who noticed that... Jin Zixuan was blushing.

“Why are you pouting?”

“I am not.”

“Eh? You are!” Wei Wuxian poked his chubby cheek and giggled. Lan Wangji found himself trying to stop himself from smiling but Wei Wuxian’s expression broke his will, a small smile formed on his face. This made Wei Wuxian laugh as he continued leading the way.

They were then sent on night hunts under the supervision of senior Lan disciples. They were being grouped randomly on every mission so they got to acquaint themselves with others.

“Wei-gongzi,” Wei Wuxian turned to see Jin Zixuan approach them. Lan Wangji’s lips twitched. They just came from a night hunt and the two were in the same team.

“I just... wanted to thank you... for saving me earlier.”

“Eh?” Wei Wuxian tilted his head and then he recalled it and started laughing as he waved his hand.

“It was nothing, Jin-gongzi! It was just a split second lapse from you and what is the point of being in one team if we don’t have each other’s backs, right?”

“Ah... yes.”

Lan Wangji could see the way Jin Zixuan blush and pursed his lips.

“Is Wei Ying hurt?”

“Me? Hurt? Did I whine?”

“No.”

“Then I’m not! I’m perfectly fine, Lan Zhan! Look!” He even twirled in front of Lan Wangji to show that he was unscathed and still looking pristine in his white and blue robes with cloud embroidery on his shoulders and chest, and his belt has a thin red ribbon around it.

The seamstress of Cloud Recesses has long made robes for Wei Wuxian with the presence of a thin red ribbon on his belt. The red ribbon that used to be tied on the knot of his sash when he was a kid is kept dearly in his treasure box. Lastly, his ribbon is still perfectly placed on his forehead.

He would usually whine if he was hurt and Lan Wangji would fuss over him. Whatever injury must not reach Lan Qiren or he would be the one to fuss over Wei Wuxian and he would end up sleeping in his old room in his quarters to make sure that Wei Wuxian heals well. The memories of how sick he was when he first found him must have left a huge impact on the esteemed teacher.

Lan Wangji glanced at Jin Zixuan who could not even look up to look at them and Lan Wangji tried not to look smug.

“Then, I’ll excuse myself,” Jin Zixuan said and left after they exchanged bows.

“What’s wrong with him?”

Lan Wangji did not reply. Wei Wuxian shrugged his shoulders as he elbowed him and pointed up the sky.

“Time to visit our friends!”

“Mn.”

They headed to the kitchen to take the basket of carrots and lettuces the kitchen reserves for their little friends in the back hills.

To *his credit*, Jiang Wanyin has not done anything after his last punishment. He has been *oddly* behaving. Liu Meiyue is one of those who randomly groups the disciples during their night hunts and she made sure not to have the Jiang Sect Heir be in the same group as Wei Wuxian and it seemed to work well.

Jiang Wanyin has notably been focusing more on his studies and cultivation and has not been causing any troubles though his scowls and frowns towards others are still notable... especially towards Wei Wuxian. People have started to gossip about how Jiang Wanyin must have something against Wei Wuxian to treat him this way and Wei Wuxian does not even pay him attention.

“Well, if Lan-laoshi’s prized ward put me to place, I would really feel embarrassed.”

“He looks like he hates him from the very first day.”

“Correction, Jiang Wanyin hates everyone breathing. I always hold my breath every night hunting group announcements. I do not wish to be in the same group as him!”

“Ah! Imagine walking beside someone who emits an ominous aura every day?”

“I pity Jiang Yanli for having to deal with a brat but then again, one cannot choose their siblings.”

“Shh! He’s coming-he’s coming!”

On one random day, Nie Mingjue came to ‘check’ on Nie Huaisang and bring him a few things from Nie Mingyu as well as a letter from his father to Qinghengjun. What’s the use of a messenger when Nie Mingjue could come and bring it, right?

Wei Wuxian kept on snickering as the four of them walked around. Nie Mingjue has not stopped glancing at Lan Xichen who was wearing his new blue and silver robes in preparation for his senior discipleship by the next season.

“Da-ge, you should come and see our sword training later!”

“Is Huaisang joining?”

This made both Wei Wuxian and Lan Xichen chuckle.

“A-Sang does better with hand-to-hand combat than his saber. Mingyu-ayi makes sure of that,” Xichen replied. Nie Mingjue exasperatedly sighed.

“At least he flies with it, I guess that’s better than nothing,” Nie Mingjue muttered.

“Nie-xiong is finishing his new script. He’ll probably have it ready by the time the lectures end,” Wei Wuxian offered and Nie Mingjue just huffed.

Lan Wangji just listened with interest as they made their way to the training field.

When Master Lan Yusheng, the Gusu-Lan swordmaster and the one who supervises the sword practice saw them approaching, he did not think twice to invite Nie Mingjue and Lan Xichen to show a *simple* match.

Everyone waited with interest as Shouyue and Baxia were unsheathed. The two were measuring each other, checking who would attack first. In the end, they both moved forward and the first clash between the two famous spiritual tools caused a huge impact around the training field. A bluish-white glare and dark green glare were seen and the impressive exchange of sword and saber blows followed.

They both had serious looks on their eyes that showed that they were taking it seriously, yet the tiny smirk (or smile for Lan Xichen) on their lips says that they are also enjoying what

they were doing.

“I yield!”

“I yield!”

They said in unison the moment Shouyue and Baxia were pointed on each other’s neck.

They gave each other a respectful bow after sheathing their swords and they could hear amazed and impressed murmurs around them. They just witnessed a very impressive spar after all.

Master Lan Yusheng complimented the two Sect Heirs and announced that it was time for the duels between disciples to showcase their sword techniques.

He had a jar with the names of the disciples in the advanced class since they were the first ones to do it. The disciples were divided according to their level of cultivation to not overwhelm those who are still in mid and low level with their cultivation and not allow those with high cultivation to overpower the rest.

“First is Lan-er-gongzi,” he announced after picking the wooden stick with Lan Wangji’s name. Wangji moved forward.

“And Jin-gongzi, Jin Zixuan,” he said after picking the next stick. Jin Zixuan moved forward.

The match was between the strength and stamina of Bichen and the agility and vitality of Suihua. When Bichen attacks, Suihua cuts and attacks back. It was a beautiful and impressive exchange of blows between the two young masters. They were both moving with grace and the fluttering of their robes made things look magical.

Lan Wangji and Jin Zixuan do not hold back with their blows, showcasing their prowess in front of their fellow disciples.

Everyone could feel their powerful cores thrumming with the way they lunge and strike their swords.

Still, it ended with Lan Wangji disarming Jin Zixuan with Siuhua dropping on the ground. The Jin Sect Heir accepted the defeat and they exchanged bows.

Nie Mingjue nodded approvingly at the two as he and Xichen exchanged glances.

“Aiyah, Lan Zhan! That was a clean finish!” Wei Wuxian said as he patted Lan Wangji’s shoulder.

“Mn. Learned it from Wei Ying.”

“Oh? From me?” he pointed at himself. Nie Mingjue just huffed as he shook his head.

Two more matches followed and finally, Wei Wuxian’s name was called.

He beamed at the three before he moved forward.

“Jiang-gongzi, Jiang Wanyin.”

Everyone was surprised.

No one expected that but there were a few who were anticipating for this to happen.

Jiang Wanyin moved forward, eyes glinting with fury.

Lan Wangji watched as Wei Wuxian barely concealed his smirk as he unsheathed his sword.

A lot of disciples were talking about how Jiang Wanyin has been waiting for this.

When the two disciples reached the center of the battleground, Jiang Wanyin did not hesitate to attack. Wei Wuxian defended himself using his scabbard and followed the attack with his sword to push Jiang Wanyin back. He did not hold back his arm strength on that attack.

The Jiang Sect Heir hissed as he glared at him.

“Are you insulting me?! Fight me equally!”

“As you wish, Jiang-gongzi.” And it was Wei Wuxian’s turn to move.

The exchange of blows between two swords created purple and red sword glares each time they clashed. It sounded... different from the other matches earlier. It almost felt like their lives were on the line.

The Lan disciples were watching with interest. Everyone knows how powerful Wei Wuxian’s golden core is. He and Lan Wangji formed their core together and developed it with Lan Xichen. The three of them have the strongest cores among the disciples of Gusu-Lan. Clashing swords with them is both an honor and a huge challenge.

Wei Wuxian is usually more playful and would correct their stance during the spar while Lan Xichen and Lan Wangji would do it at the end of it.

Yet now, they could not see any glint of playfulness with Wei Wuxian. They could not even feel him using much of his spiritual energy - his core during the fight.

And then Jiang Wanyin dropped his sword after a two-blow combination from Wei Wuxian.

“Pick it up. Again! It’s not over yet!” Wei Wuxian’s voice was hard and it made Jiang Wanyin grit his teeth as he summoned his sword and attacked.

Then Jiang Wanyin fell back, elbows supporting his upper back as he panted.

Wei Wuxian raised his brow as Jiang Wanyin gritted his teeth and stood up.

“Again!”

Master Lan Yusheng raised his brow with interest as he crossed his arm. It is obvious that the two seemed to forget that they have spectators around them.

Lan Wangji knew that Wei Wuxian has been trying to extend his patience for the longest time now. It seems like Wei Wuxian found the perfect opportunity to *let go* though *not fully*. Lan Wangji could tell he is still holding back, probably not wanting to seriously hurt the Jiang Sect Heir.

Wangji knows that Wei Wuxian could deal with excited novices who would call him ‘Wei-shixiong!’ and ‘Xian-gege’ in private. They would sometimes be hard to control but Wei Wuxian’s patience would never run out.

Then there is Jiang Wanyin. They still could not understand why Jiang Wanyin seemed to have hatred towards Wei Wuxian. Lan Qiren would huff and stroke his beard when they would recall what happened in their day after dinner. As much as they do not want to mention Jiang Wanyin, even Lan Qijun would ask about him sometimes.

“Well, I have been accidentally... hearing things while walking around.”

So watching Wei Wuxian toying around Jiang Wanyin in this duel is a sight that Lan Wangji did not know he wanted to see. Lan Wangji could also see the other Lan disciples who joined the lectures were looking at the duel with interest. They have all clashed against Suibian and it is obvious that Wei Wuxian was barely using his spiritual energy against Jiang Wanyin. He is using more of his pure strength, agility, and footwork.

Lan Wangji did not even blink when Sandu flew out of the battlegrounds and landed in front of Nie Mingjue but still inside the wards of the battleground. Sandu flew out of the duel circle after the strong impact of Wei Wuxian’s triple-blow combination.

Nie Mingjue had an amused expression on his face as he looked at the sword. Lan Wangji also looked at his brother and Lan Xichen may not be showing expression on his face but Wangji could see that his brother was interested and would surely ask Wei Wuxian about this later.

As he was disarmed with his sword leaving the battle circle, Wei Wuxian was declared the winner.

The furry on Jiang Wanyin’s face does not leave, his entire face turning purple and he looked like he was close to qi deviation.

Jiang Wanyin took several deep breaths as he could hear his mother’s voice in his head... about not shaming the name of their sect, about not allowing others to look down on them, about –

“Wei Wuxian!”

Wei Wuxian turned to face him.

“This is not the end.”

To his surprise, Wei Wuxian scoffed.

“I do not know what’s with you and your obsession with dueling with me but here it is, Jiang-gongzi. I gave you the duel that you have been asking. We fought, fair and square, you lost. If you want a rematch, wait for the next one. I won’t fight you just because you ask me, Jiang-gongzi. Let us maintain respect here.”

Jiang Yanli learned about what happened to the advanced class after she also lost on her own match because no matter how much she trains, her cultivation level seemed to never advance.

“Here, A-Cheng, I made soup.”

Chapter End Notes

Well, Jiang Wanyin got the duel he wanted though the result was... something he did not like.

Oh... and I did say it will be quite tiring, right? Or is it just me? 😊

The next chapter deals with the Lantern Festival and its aftermath. Don't expect much though 😊😂

Oh and... am I actually hinting for a *possible* fic for a rare pair that caught my attention? 🙄😂😂

EDIT: the rare pair I was hinting at will definitely not happen in this fic 😂 I was just talking about the rare pair that I might write a fic for in the future (though I doubt myself on that lol)

Always be safe and have a nice day 💕

Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

Hello!

Before anything else... I SWEAR, 8 is the final chapter count of this fic. No more, no less. Promise. fnsdfknsdlf I was facepalming when I changed the chapter count AGAIN. huhu. Someone teach me self-control. lol.

But yayyy for an update ~

Nothing much happened here or idk 🧑♀️ 😊 😊

Thank you so much for reading, commenting, and leaving kudos to this fic, it means a lot to me. I truly like reading and going through your comments, it boosts me up 😊 😊 to everyone who agrees that WHO wouldn't have a crush on WWX, *high five* (well, except JC in this fic lol)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Right after their examination, everyone was excited about the lantern festival.

Lan Wangji and Wei Wuxian prepared their materials together. Wei Wuxian even teased Nie Huaisang for asking Wen Qionglin to prepare their lanterns together.

“Hi, Wen-guniang! Come-come! I brought enough paints for the three of us!” Nie Huaisang excitedly showed the paints to Wen Qing who was looking at Nie Huaisang and then her blushing brother.

Wei Wuxian snickered as he elbowed Lan Wangji.

“Will Nie-xiong succeed?”

“Wei Ying.”

“What? Come on! It’s interesting! Wen-guniang is too protective of Wen-xiong and you’re blind if you don’t see those heart eyes that Nie-xiong and Wen-xiong are exchanging each opportunity they get.”

Lan Wangji cleared his throat as he focused on his lantern. Wei Wuxian just laughed as he continued painting as well.

Once they were finished, Wei Wuxian showed him his lantern and Lan Wangji shyly showed him his in return.

“Don’t you think... we should exchange lanterns, hm?”

Lan Wangji's ears turned red as he nodded and Wei Wuxian handed him his lantern.

They both drew a bunny with a forehead ribbon on their lantern. With the red paint that Nie Huaisang teasingly handed Lan Wangji earlier, Lan Wangji drew a red ribbon on his bunny's neck.

When it was time to release the lanterns, they both released their lanterns and Wei Wuxian closed his eyes as he put his hands together.

"I, Wei Wuxian, promises to protect the weak, defend the innocent, fight evil, and live without regrets."

When he opened his eyes, he looked at Lan Wangji who was looking at him the whole time.

"I, Lan Wangji, promises to protect the weak, defend the innocent, fight evil, and live without regrets."

Wei Wuxian beamed as his entire face turned red when he heard him speak. Lan Wangji's ears were not faring well either.

When everyone's lanterns were released, Wei Wuxian approached Nie Huaisang and the Wen siblings.

"Wei-xiong! I asked Wen-guniang and Wen-xiong to join us on a boat ride tomorrow!"

"Ah, of course! We could recommend some of the best tea houses to Wen-guniang and Wen-xiong too! They are places that serve Gusu delicacies. You can never taste them around Qishan!"

Wen Qing just looked at him and then back to Nie Huaisang and her brother who had a hopeful look in his eyes. As if Wen Qing could say no to that. She could only sigh.

As they walked their way down the path, Wei Wuxian and Lan Wangji were immediately alerted when they heard commotion ahead of them. Then they heard familiar voices that made the two exchange glances. They left their company and headed down fast, almost running, and were welcomed by a sight that made both of their brows twitch.

"Jin-gongzi! Jiang-gongzi!" Wei Wuxian pulled Jin Zixuan while Lan Wangji raised Bichen's scabbard to block Jiang Wanyin from moving forward once more.

They both have bloodied and busted lips while Jiang Yanli was trying to hold back her brother.

"A-Cheng, stop!"

"No, a-jie! What?! Jin Zixuan?! You are saying forget it?! Why?! Are you cut sleeve now?!"

Everyone's surprised by Jiang Wanyin's words but as Jin Zixuan was about to reply, he realized that he could not open his lips. His entire face turned redder. Jiang Wanyin tried to

open his lips and he was in the same state. He glared at Wei Wuxian who was also looking at him and then he looked at Lan Wangji.

“Jin-gongzi and Jiang-gongzi must come with us to the Discipline Hall.”

Lan Wangji’s voice did not leave any room for more arguments.

It was the last offense for Jiang Wanyin.

Jiang Fengmian was called.

Since the fight started because of what Jin Zixuan said which also involved his betrothal, Qinghengjun decided to call Jin Guangshan as well.

The rest of the disciples were dismissed to rest while Jiang Wanyin and Jin Zixuan were checked by healers and were asked to kneel as punishment and will be dealt further with once their parents arrive.

It was the first time that they had to call two sect leaders of the great sects to come over for their children who attended the lectures.

Lan Qijun could already feel a headache coming and Liu Meiyue could only chuckle as she gave him a massage before they head to bed.

“It’ll be fine. I’ll be there with you.”

“YU ZIYUAN!”

Lan Wangji has never seen Baiqiu, Lan Qiren’s sword glow the way it just did as it flew straight out of his uncle’s scabbard, twirled the end of Zidian's whip around its blade and the hilt instantly returned to his uncle’s hand. The Zidian’s ring also came with it, pulling it away from Yu Ziyuan’s wrist and finger.

Lan Wangji wanted to move but Liu Meiyue and Lan Qiren were covering them and his father who came out of the Hanshi last had his scabbard position like he was ready to unsheathe it anytime.

Jin Guangshan and Jin Zixuan looked flabbergasted with what they have just witnessed.

“What is going on here?!” Lan Qijun asked as he faced the three Jiangs in front of them.

Lan Wangji reached out to hold Wei Wuxian’s cold hand, he looked shaken by what just happened a few moments ago.

One moment, they were walking towards the Hanshi as they were to report to their parents after the meeting with the Sect Leaders. The next moment, the woman in purple screamed “Wei Ying!” and the whip unleashed from her ring.

Jiang Fengmian looked equally shocked as to what his wife had just done as he held her elbow tightly to stop her from moving forward. Even Jiang Wanyin was doing the same.

“You are Wei Ying, Wei Changze, and Cangse’s son!” she pointed her shaking finger at them.

“Yu Ziyuan, I am warning you or you would not want to know what will happen next,” Lan Qiren spoke, voice hard as steel as Zidian was still dangling on his sword’s blade.

“My son was just telling me about what your ward has been doing!”

Before Lan Qiren could reply, Lan Qijun came between them, his eyes glaring with authority.

“We will continue this conversation inside.”

He eyed Jiang Fengmian before he looked at Yu Ziyuan and then Jiang Wanyin.

“A-Ying, A-Zhan, escort Jin-zongzhu and Jin-gongzi to their guest quarters,” he instructed.

“No! I believe that Jin-gongzi should be here,” Yu Ziyuan replied.

“Yu-furen, what has my son have to do with this? The betrothal has been-“

“Well, Jin-zongzhu, if you are interested to know what may have *happened* during the lectures for your son to act this way, then you should come,” Yu Ziyuan’s eyes do not leave Wei Wuxian who had Lan Qiren covering him the whole time.

“Jiang-furen,” Liu Meiyue met her eyes. “I do not know what you are trying to say but I am asking you to control yourself. You are not in Lotus Pier,” it was a mere reminder but it carried a heavyweight. Liu Meiyue may not be holding her sword right now but she would not think twice about materializing her sword on her palm if Yu Ziyuan continues to disrespect her family in her home.

“Lan-furen,” Yu Ziyuan raised her brow. “You might not know what your precious ward has been doing behind your backs.”

“San-niang-“

“No! A-Cheng said he saw it!”

“San-“

“What did Jiang-gongzi see?” Liu Meiyue focused her attention on Jiang Wanyin who was scowling while watching things unfold in front of him.

“Wei Wuxian was getting Jin Zixuan’s attention.”

“What?!” Wei Wuxian seemed to recover as he sidestepped to see Jiang Wanyin’s face.

“I did what?!”

“Jiang Wanyin!” Jin Zixuan also raised his voice while he stood beside his father.

“What? I asked you if you were a cut-sleeve, right? Are you not? You kept on blushing each time-“

“Jiang Wanyin, stop it!” Wei Wuxian was shaking in anger. He felt Lan Wangji’s hold of his hand become tighter.

“Gossip is forbidden in Cloud Recesses,” Lan Qiren pointed out.

“I would never covet someone’s intended, *Jiang-gongzi* . Control yourself and choose your words properly. What is wrong with being a cut-sleeve anyway?” Wei Wuxian glared at him while he tried to keep himself grounded by holding Lan Wangji’s hand, the other hand gripping his sword. Having Lan Qiren in front of him helps a lot too.

“Who are you to tell my son what he should do?!” Yu Ziyuan almost moved forward when Jiang Fengmian pulled her back.

Jin Zixuan’s entire face turned red but he was glaring at Jiang Wanyin as well.

“Then explain why you do not like my sister?! You were hostile towards her!” Jiang Wanyin turned his attention to Jin Zixuan.

“Whatever my son’s answer will be, the situation remains the same,” Jin Guangshan spoke up. As much as he enjoys the drama, he does not wish to involve himself in something that he does not have any gains in. Between the two, it is obvious that Gusu-Lan has greater power than Yunmeng-Jiang as of now, getting involved in this rift will not be beneficial to him at all. “We have come to an agreement. We are breaking the engagement as suggested by your father.”

“A-die?!”

“A-Cheng, we will talk about this later-“

“But a-jie-“

“A-Cheng, later!” Yu Ziyuan narrowed her eyes on him before she looked at Wei Wuxian once more.

“We. Are. Continuing this conversation inside,” Lan Qijun spoke once more, voice hard as he pointedly looked at everyone standing outside his home. Hanshi was warded with a silencing

dome so the noise would not be heard outside. He knows that Xichen is handling the rest of the disciples outside so he would not worry about anyone coming near his place.

“Go,” Liu Meiyue took that as a cue to turn around and face her boys. She touched Wei Wuxian’s arms, he was trembling a little as he eyed the Jiangs. Liu Meiyue moved to cover his line of sight with her face, not wanting him to see the Jiangs anymore.

“A-Ying, rest if you have to. A-Zhan will lead the Jins to their quarters. See the bunnies or rest in your room. I’ll see you after,” she said in the calmest voice possible as Wei Wuxian swallowed and nodded.

“Shushu...” his voice was almost a whisper as he looked at Lan Qiren. No one has ever seen such fury from Lan Qiren yet his energy is overpowering everyone as of the moment.

“Go. I’ll see you later, I promise.”

“Mn,” Wei Wuxian nodded as he looked at Lan Qijun and bowed to him, and then he spared the Jiangs one last glance, making sure to meet Jiang Wanyin’s eyes before he left without looking back. He held his head high, his back straight, his shoulders squared, and the ends of his forehead ribbon fluttering beautifully as he walked.

Lan Wangji’s sharp glare landed on the Jiangs first before he approached the Jins and led the way. He also made sure to meet Jin Zixuan’s eyes who looked either furious and flustered, Lan Wangji cannot tell.

“Now, how about we come inside once more?” Lan Qijun’s sharp glare reminded them of how Lan Wangji just looked at them earlier. Liu Meiyue moved to get Zidian from Lan Qiren’s blade, not bothering to return it to Yu Ziyuan, and followed her husband instead.

“That is mine!”

Liu Meiyue turned around to face her.

"And we are confiscating it until we are sure that you would not *randomly* use it against any of our disciples." She resumed walking.

“Yu Ziyuan, you should return to the Hanshi unless Yunmeng-Jiang wants to see how Gusu-Lan is protective of our own,” Lan Qiren’s eyes narrowed, his head held high as he signaled the three Jiangs to follow his brother and sister-in-law.

“San-niang, no more words. We are going in.”

“Fengmian-“ Yu Ziyuan gritted her teeth as Jiang Fengmian tugged her to follow him, Jiang Wanyin followed behind her and Lan Qiren entered last.

“Pack your things. You have no purpose to stay here!”

Zidian has not stopped sparkling ever since they arrived in the Jiang’s guest quarters. Whatever happened in the Hanshi was something that Jiang Fengmian will have to work hard on fixing if he wants to keep peace in the cultivation world.

“San-niang-“

“Do not speak with me, Fengmian.” Those words were spoken with so much venom that Jiang Fengmian decided to turn around and instruct the rest of their disciples to hasten their movements. They need to reach Caiyi Town before sunset and stay there for the night then ride a boat to Yunmeng the next day.

Even if they were offered to stay for the night, Jiang Fengmian’s pride has been ruined enough for him to even think of staying in this place any longer.

The warning of Gusu-Lan cutting ties with Yunmeng-Jiang was a hard hit to them. He has no idea why his wife showed too much anger towards Wei Wuxian when it was the first time that they met as far as he knows.

He had talked to her when they arrived in Caiyi Town earlier.

“San-niang.”

“Fengmian.”

“Will you control-“

“What-“

“San-niang, listen to me on this. We do not know A-Cheng’s reason why he did that but we should come to Cloud Recesses with an open and calm mind.”

“Your son already ruined the face and the name of the sect with what he did!”

“And I know that you would not want to besmirch it even more. Will you control yourself later, San-niang? For Yunmeng-Jiang?”

His wife glared at him but to his surprise, Yu Ziyuan nodded and he felt her qi calm down a little. He felt her anger the whole time they were flying to Cloud Recesses and he heard Zidian crackle several times.

He knows that the face and the name of the sect matters too much to his wife.

When they sat in front of Qinghengjun, Liu Meiyue, and Lan Qiren while Jin Guangshan waited in the other room, he was actually *impressed* as it was the *most control* his wife could

give herself over the conversation they were having.

“Your son has broken countless rules and they were not just rules that could easily be excused. He attacked a disciple unprovoked. He activated a talisman that could have caused a serious situation, lastly, he caused another fight,” Lan Qijun said.

“And he has not been faring well with our lessons-“

“Lan Qiren, are you saying that my son is stupid?”

“Yu Ziyuan, that is not what I am trying to say.”

“That is what you are implying.”

“San-niang, let us let Qiren continue speaking.”

“As I was saying, we have tried reaching out to him. We do not give special treatment but as an heir, we try to make sure that the teachings we impart on the lectures will be beneficial for them.”

“Then perhaps, your teachings are not beneficial if my son cannot fare well with it.”

Jiang Fengmian stopped the conversation before it could escalate further. Since they were students, Lan Qiren and Yu Ziyuan could not stand each other. They could not stand each other's attitude and could only agree on one thing, their *dislike* on Cangse Sanren.

“As much as we would like to continue teaching your son, what happened between him and Jin-gongzi was his last offense. We are expelling Jiang-gongzi from the lectures.”

Jiang Fengmian tried to negotiate but his wife already said that they would bring their children and disciples home.

Just then, as Gusu-Lan is a neutral ground, he discussed the betrothal between Jin Zixuan and their daughter. His wife was greatly opposed to his offer of breaking the engagement.

“No! Fengmian, you cannot break the engagement!”

“San-niang, it is only temporary and just until our children are old enough for this.”

Jin Guangshan accepted the suggestion while Yu Ziyuan was displeased beside him. She was obviously holding back, not wanting to create a greater scene in front of Lan Qijun, Liu Meiyue, and Lan Qiren.

He thought that his wife handled it well. She was able to *stop* herself each time she was *close* to losing it. All they had to do was leave Cloud Recesses peacefully and he'd deal with the *aftermath* of having to ask his wife to hold back and control herself for the *face* of the sect.

But then on their way out, their son began talking about Jin Zixuan being a cut-sleeve who seemed to be infatuated with Wei Wuxian. Even Jiang Fengmian was surprised by his son's words. Then when they saw two people in white, approaching the Hanshi, his wife *lost her control* and attacked the youth unprovoked.

It was truly a shock when Lan Qiren who was still at the door of the Hanshi was able to release his sword while Liu Meiyue jumped to where the two boys were standing and covered them. Lan Qiren followed her while his sword returned to his hand.

To Jiang Fengmian's surprise, the force and qi of Lan Qiren were so strong that Zidian pulled out of his wife's wrist. Zidian does not leave its master.

Throughout the discussion inside the Hanshi, his wife was just trembling in anger beside him.

"Go on, defend that boy and you will see that he is nothing but bad luck to you."

"Yu Ziyuan!"

"I do not know what you have with your ward, Lan Qiren but I am speaking the truth. If you still value your family and your sect, you would not want to continue associating with that brat."

"You are speaking as if you know our Wei Ying more than we do."

Liu Meiyue's voice was sharp on all edges and it caused a few expressions to pass by his wife's face but it was too quick that Jiang Fengmian was not able to name them before she frowned once more.

"He is Cangse Sanren and Wei Changze's son. What is more to know than that?"

"You are speaking ill of the dead, Yu Ziyuan."

"Lan Qiren, it has been years... do not tell me you still..."

The mockery was palpable that Lan Qiren's anger was felt around the room.

"Yu Ziyuan!"

"San-niang-"

"Are you also defending that brat, Fengmian? Just because he is their son?! Defending him over your son's words?! You do not even know him personally!"

"I have heard enough."

The moment Jiang Fengmian heard those words from Lan Qijun, he had to brace himself.

Qinghengjun gave them a last warning: if they do anything to *their disciples*, they will cut ties with Yunmeng-Jiang.

Only Jiang Fengmian as the Sect Leader was allowed to enter Cloud Recesses and it is only for official sect business. Yu Ziyuan was banned from entering Cloud Recesses until she reflected on her actions.

"You attacked one of my disciples -- my brother's ward unprovoked. Even my son was with him. Truthfully, regardless of who it was, you tried to hurt one of ours due to an unfounded rumor and whatever you have against him, Jiang-furen. I cannot accept that. You would either adhere to our conditions or Gusu-Lan would stop association with anything towards Yunmeng-Jiang."

One of the hardest blows from Lan Qijun was when he said that "in line with this, to ensure the safety of our disciples, we would not be sending anyone in the territory of Yunmeng. I do not want to hear any of our disciples being attacked unprovoked."

Jiang Fengmian felt insulted.

"Are you saying that your disciples are not safe in my territory?"

"Jiang-zongzhu, yes, that is what I am saying."

"Qinghengjun!"

"Jiang-zongzhu, I do not know what you would do if you were in my place and see someone try to hurt one of my own. I would not stand at the side and allow that to happen again. This is a preventive measure on my part."

"Qinghengjun! This is absurd!"

"And this is my condition. It is either you and your wife would accept it or we can make an announcement by tomorrow morning."

His son has not said anything throughout the meeting. The Lans did not even ask for him to apologize for what he said, but Liu Meiyue spoke to him before they left.

"Jiang-gongzi, you have a wide future ahead of you. Open your eyes and mind and do not let other's opinions and judgments cloud yours. I do not know what Wei Wuxian has done for you to treat him this way but I hope that you know that a person could only

have much patience especially when provoked. Good luck with your cultivation, Jiang-gongzi.”

He is only thankful that Lan Qijun said that they would not be announcing what transpired between them to the cultivation world. It would be a huge humiliation for Yunmeng-Jiang. It will stay inside the Hanshi as long as they follow their end of the deal.

Jiang Fengmian felt like he was missing something. He felt like his wife was keeping something from him... then again, they have never truly been open to each other. He wanted to ask her but Yu Ziyuan was evading him and he could already foresee the number of dummies that will be destroyed once they arrive at Lotus Pier.

He truly hopes he could understand his wife one day.

Lan Wangji will never like Yunmeng-Jiang. He established this the moment Jiang Fengmian tried to get close to Wei Wuxian in Qishan. Then Jiang Wanyin happened. Then what the Madam of the Jiang Sect tried to do has nailed his feelings towards the said sect. He will *never* like Yunmeng-Jiang.

He still does not know the reason behind what happened and he was itching to go to nainai and ask because he doubts that his mother would tell him. His brother met with him after he escorted the Jins to their quarters and he told him about what happened. He saw the anger and disappointment pass through his brother's face.

They wanted to see Wei Wuxian but when they arrived in his room, he was not there. He was also not in the back hills with the bunnies, not in the library, training field, archery field, experimentation quarters, or anywhere where they would usually find him.

“Zewujun, Lan-er-gongzi, Wei-xiong went to Lan-laoshi's quarters. He asked me to tell you when I entered our room earlier.”

“Chengmei -- Xue-shidi...”

“Yes, Zewujun?”

“How was he?”

Their shidi who was also Wei Wuxian's roommate and a close friend, pursed his lips as he sighed.

“He was... Sad? Angry? Confused? I don't know how to name it but he was zoning out when I entered our room. I asked if he needed anything but he just stood up and told me where he was going.”

“I see. Thank you, Xue-shidi.”

“Anytime, Zewujun, Lan-er-gongzi.”

They came closer to their uncle’s quarters and they felt Wei Wuxian and their uncle’s presence there. They hope to comfort him but it seems like only their uncle could provide it right now.

Instead, Lan Wangji headed to the gates where his brother was assigned to escort the Yunmeng-Jiang Sect out. Their father also showed up and everything felt *cold*. It was obvious that both parties were trying to control themselves. Wangji saw that Zidian was back on Yu Ziyuan’s wrist and it was awake, probably reacting to her emotions.

“Yunmeng-Jiang Sect will not be allowed entrance to Cloud Recesses unless it is for official sect business and only Jiang-zongzhu is allowed to enter. This will be disseminated to everyone by tonight.”

Their father’s instructions to the patrol on duty surprised Wangji and his brother... yet Wangji felt satisfied hearing that.

“Good.” He muttered.

“Indeed,” his brother agreed.

The lectures have not ended yet but Jiang Yanli was already inside an inn in Caiyi Town for them to spend the night before they head back to Yunmeng. Of course, she misses Lotus Pier but she did not realize the weight of their situation until her mother asked her to pack her things.

She was already worried over how her brother was faring in the lectures. They were not used to such an environment. They always had a *special treatment* in Lotus Pier. No one would admit that but it is true. They do not get picked for recitations, they always get the top scores for their respective classes, there were no *huge competitions* that will truly be a *challenge* for them. There are students from Meishan-Yu that would come to train them but that was it.

Yunmeng-Jiang has long practiced isolationism so they do not truly engage in inter-sect activities. They have their mother to handle their training.

Being in Gusu to attend the lectures was like opening their eyes to the real world. It made Yanli realize that everything that their mother was trying to instill in them about training, night hunting, and cultivation was not enough. The rest of the Yunmeng-Jiang disciples had the same struggle as her and she could see it in her brother too.

To add on the things that Jiang Yanli needed to think about was the way her brother was acting towards the other disciples, especially to Wei Wuxian.

She knew that their mother has not stopped mentioning Wei Wuxian ever since the archery competition. Their father has mentioned to her that Wei Wuxian was the child he was looking for when they were young. She has seen him return home looking disheartened.

Their mother's words about Wei Wuxian seemed to have nailed in her brother's head that he does not stop competing with him even if Wei Wuxian does not have a single interest in what her brother was trying to do.

Then Yanli has her own things to focus on. She was thankful that Gusu-Lan lectures were considerate enough to the level of cultivation of every disciple. Despite how much her mother tried to insist on her to improve her cultivation, her body that was once a victim of a serious illness when she was young could not develop her cultivation to the level her mother wished for her to have.

Then there was her betrothed whose presence in Cloud Recesses should have meant for the both of them to get acquainted but they barely meet. Jin Zixuan does not even try and she does not know what to do aside from looking from afar. Since she was young, it was instilled to her that she was marrying this man and yet they never moved past knowing each other's name. Her brother's dislike towards him added to her problem.

She knew that he does not usually interact with others outside his cohort but she saw him speak with Wei Wuxian a couple of times and he looked... *shy*. The expression on his face was something that Yanli wished to see when they interact but it has always been nothing but formality between them. She does not wish to put color on whatever that is. She could clearly see that Wei Wuxian and Lan Wangji have *something* going on between them.

Yet her brother noticed it too as she heard him muttering about it.

It made Jiang Yanli sigh.

Wei Wuxian has everything that she does not have. He is undeniably a beauty – handsome and beautiful all in one. He has a very nice and approachable personality. He is intelligent, a genius, and has a high level of cultivation. He may not directly come from a gentry family (which is the only advantage that Yanli has) but he is known as Lan Qiren's prized ward. Most of all, he is surely someone who grew up with a happy family that is filled with love.

Yanli does not have them at all. She would not be surprised if this is the reason why Jin Zixuan could easily blush and get flustered in his presence just like the other disciples. He and Lan Wangji together is truly a sight to behold.

Perhaps, Yanli thinks that this is what jealousy feels like. Deep inside, she feels jealous towards a young man whom she barely knows.

She has resigned herself to live a life under her mother's shadows and marry into a clan as promised by two sworn sisters but it seems like it will not be the case.

Her betrothal was broken. She won't be marrying Jin Zixuan anymore and she could already picture how huge of a fight this will become once they reach Lotus Pier where her mother could reign over everyone.

The coldness between her parents as they stayed in the inn feels like a foreboding of what will happen in less than 24 hours.

Jiang Wanyin's expulsion due to his actions during the lectures was already concerning enough but he ended it with an unfounded rumor against Wei Wuxian and Jin Zixuan. Then her mother attacked Wei Wuxian – unprovoked. It caused the banning of Yunmeng-Jiang Sect to Cloud Recesses (especially her mother) except for the official sect business of the Sect Leader. The only saving grace is the fact that the other guest disciples were 'busy' and were not able to see the Yunmeng-Jiang Sect leave, escorted by the Lan Sect Leader and his sons.

Their mother has always been someone who values the name, the reputation, the face of the sect more than anything else. For her to *cause* one of the reasons why *everything* happened in Cloud Recesses, Yanli cannot help but wonder if there is something more in the situation.

"A-jie, I'm sor-"

"It's okay, A-Cheng."

"Jie..."

"Let us rest, A-Cheng. It will be a long day tomorrow."

From everything that Jiang Wanyin did, the only thing that he regrets was the broken betrothal of his sister to that arrogant man. It was not because he valued the betrothal but because he knew that his sister likes that man even if he may be a cut sleeve.

Jiang Wanyin knew what he saw. Jin Zixuan was a blushing mess in front of that Wei Wuxian.

He could feel anger bubbling inside him as he cleaned Sandu. He recalled how Sandu flew out of the battle circle during their duel. It was not supposed to be the end. He would make sure to make Wei Wuxian get an ugly loss and now, he does not have a chance to do so because they left Cloud Recesses.

Expulsion? He has not come up with an idea to use as an answer to his mother once they reach Lotus Pier. Perhaps, he'll have to kneel in the Ancestral Hall for hours. Maybe he could also mention how the shidis and shimeis were not doing well so his mother's attention will go to them and not just to him. It was a good plan.

He already saw how angry his mother was when they arrived in the Hanshi where he and Jin Zixuan were called and waited outside. The talk went for quite some time while they were

kneeling and were asked to stand when their parents left.

He immediately told his mother of what he *observed* between Jin Zixuan and Wei Wuxian. Zidian woke and the next thing he knew, his mother unleashed the whip but it was captured by Lan Qiren's sword. He has heard how the esteemed teacher focused more on theories and teachings instead of going on night hunts like how his mother does... yet at that time, Jiang Wanyin felt his very strong qi and it was almost suffocating. He was too shocked the moment Zidian was pulled from his mother's wrist.

Somehow, Jiang Wanyin thinks that the reason why his mother *hates* Wei Wuxian is not just because of how he ranked higher than him despite being a ward. He *once* heard a *visiting* Sect Leader in Lotus Pier talk about it but he chose not to mind it.

It seems like he should have.

Jiang Wanyin was just passing by after leading the disciples' training. He saw Sect Leader Yao with his wife who came to Lotus Pier and were asked to wait for his father who was still meeting a village chief. His mother was out on a night hunt.

"Ah, wife, did you see Jiang Wanyin?"

"Yes husband, he was leading the training. Impressive."

Sect Leader Yao scoffed and that made Jiang Wanyin pause.

"He was bossing the disciples around, so much like his mother!"

"Shh! If someone hears you, imagine how the Violet Spider would react?"

"Am I lying though? Have you heard of the latest ranking of the young masters?"

"How could I not? Our Taotao only ranked fifteenth!"

"Well, you heard how Lan Qiren's prized ward ranked fourth?"

"Wei Wuxian? Yes, of course! Our female disciples saw him and Lan Wangji once and they have not stopped talking about them until our Taotao got angry!"

"Exactly! Well, he is Wei Changze's son."

"You mean, the servant of Jiang-zongzhu before?"

"Yes, wife. Servant turned head disciple and guess with who."

"Who? I remember hearing he left Yunmeng-Jiang because he got married but I do not know who would marry a servant who would even leave his sect for her."

“Cangse Sanren.”

He heard Madam Yao’s loud (almost dramatic) gasp.

“You mean.... The disciple of Baoshan Sanren?!”

“Yes!”

“So you mean... that Cangse Sanren, that beautiful woman who almost got everyone –“

“I didn’t!”

“Yeah-yeah, you didn’t. Anyway, that woman who captured the attention of a lot of disciples of our generation when she showed up in Cloud Recesses?”

“Yes.”

“The woman who Jiang Fengmian got too smitten to the point that his betrothed, Yu Ziyuan got so mad-“

“Wife!”

“Oh, my-oh-my! This is big!”

“Yes. Now imagine this... the son of your servant and biggest competition to your husband’s attention and heart... living the best life in Gusu and ranking higher than your son.”

“Ah, Yu Ziyuan must have raised hell when she knew.”

“You know how she is... and you must have not known this because you were visiting your parents at that time but years ago... Jiang-zongzhu came to Pingyang and was looking for a missing child-“

“You mean Wei Wuxian?!”

“Exactly! He was looking for him but he was actually in Gusu the whole time!”

“Well, Lan Qiren seemed to have an infatuation with Cangse Sanren before.”

“That Wei Wuxian is lucky not to have ended up he-“

“Yao-zongzhu, Yao-furen, Jiang-zongzhu is waiting for you in his office. This way please.”

Jiang Wanyin gripped Sandu tighter as he heard the fading footsteps of the couple.

Truly, Jiang Wanyin regrets not giving much attention and thought to Sect Leader Yao and his wife’s conversation as he had to deal with *unruly* disciples right after he left his hiding place.

His mother put him in charge at that time until she returned so it slipped his mind.

“Was a-niang mad at that Wei Wuxian because...” the thought made him grip the hilt of Sandu tighter before he returned it to its scabbard and tossed aside the cleaning towel. He lied down on the bed but he immediately huffed and went down to order a bottle of the famed Emperor’s Smile.

He heard other guest disciples talking about the wine and of course, he *reported* this to some of the senior Lan disciples. Those disciples were punished for drinking in Cloud Recesses even if there was no special occasion. They kept it too well but too bad for them, Jiang Wanyin heard.

If this will be his last day in Gusu then he should actually have a taste of this famed wine. Maybe, it will also help him with his thoughts and prepare himself for their journey back to Lotus Pier.

Chapter End Notes

Baiqiu- white autumn

Well 😊😊😊 👁️👁️👁️
Again, there will answers~

Next chapter includes: the talk of JFM and WY in Qishan, betrothal (OMG who could it be???), 🍵 tea parties, and ZIDIAN👁️👁️


Be safe and have a great day💕


Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

Hello!



Hello September and so here's an update~

Thank you so much for reading, commenting, and leaving kudos to this fic. It means a lot to me 

Oh, and because I have no self-control(lol), here I am with a shameless promotion for a new fic of a rare pair lol 

New fic: [**Brighter than Vermillion Light**](#)

Pair: Wei Wuxian x Jin Zixuan

This is seriously just a crack treated *quite* seriously. Just in case you have some time to waste, I hope you'll check it out  

Anyway, here it is~

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Of course, some rumors came out right after guest disciples realized that the Yunmeng-Jiang Sect had left. The expulsion was announced as well as the decision of the sect to leave with the rest of their disciples.

There were even gossips about Jiang Wanyin calling Jin Zixuan a cut sleeve but one glare from the Jin Sect Heir made them shut up.

The banning of the Yunmeng-Jiang Sect was not made public. It was a private agreement after all.

Jin Guangshan left without his son and disciples after he decided to let them stay to complete the lectures.

The main family met Lan Qiren and Wei Wuxian the next morning. They ate dinner in Lan Qiren's quarters and did not accept any visitors. They understood that Wei Wuxian needed more time after what happened.

The first thing he did was hug Liu Meiyue when he saw her and she welcomed him warmly in her embrace.

“Thank you.”

“There is no need of thank you between family.”

Lan Qijun gave him the always present warm and fatherly smile he gives to the three of them and he also patted his head. Lan Xichen hugged him as well. It was too tight, a mixture of concern and protection which made him chuckle. “Aiyaaah! Huan-gege so strong!”

Lan Wangji stared at him, concern morphing with other emotions on his face until Wei Wuxian moved forward for a hug.

“Wei Ying.”

“Aiyooo... I must have worried you, Lan Zhan? I’ll tell you later, I promise.”

“Mn.”

They attended lectures and completed their responsibilities for the day. When afternoon came and they finally came to the back hills to feed the bunnies, Wei Wuxian smiled at Lan Wangji.

“I honestly don’t know where to start, Lan Zhan,” he admitted.

“Wei Ying.”

“It’s just that... I learned a lot after my talk with shushu last night.”

“Wei Ying.”

Wei Wuxian pulled his lips in as he focused on feeding the bunnies. Lan Wangji patiently waited as he petted Ying-tuzi and Zhan-tuzi on his lap.

“Lan Zhan.”

“Wei Ying.”

“Shushu told me about my past... well not mine but my parents’ past that may be the reason why... why the madam was mad at me.”

“Wei Ying does not have to tell me if-“

Wei Wuxian shook his head as he moved closer to him.

“I want to tell you and I’m telling Huan-gege about it too. I just – I just don’t know where to start, really.”

Lan Wangji swallowed hard and nodded. He will always have an abundance of patience towards Wei Wuxian.

“Shushu said that Jiang-zongzhu used to like my a-niang.”

The beginning immediately made Lan Wangji realize why Wei Wuxian does not know where to start. It felt rather... personal.

“But my a-niang likes my a-die. Shushu—shushu described a-niang as a free soul, unrestrained, a total opposite to my a-die... that’s probably why they ended up together, right?” he giggled at the thought of his parents’ love story and it made Wangji smile as well.

“Shushu said that Jiang-zongzhu... he tried confessing to my a-niang in front of him, my a-die, and Nie-zongzhu,” this time, Wei Wuxian fiddled his jade token as if it was the most interesting thing for his eyes.

“But Jiang-furen witnessed it and she got so angry because they were already betrothed. Long story short, a-niang rejected Jiang-zongzhu and announced that she likes a-die. They got married and a-die defected from Yunmeng-Jiang to become rogue since...” he pursed his lips and somehow, Wangji understood why.

“Shushu said that this was the last thing he knew from a-die since after they traveled, they never stayed in one place so no letters actually came anymore. A-die did not want to stay in Yunmeng-Jiang because of the madam.”

Wangji tilted his head as Wei Wuxian looked up and met his eyes.

“He feared that it will cause conflict, not just between him and Jiang-zongzhu but with a-niang and the madam too.”

“Wei Ying.”

“It seems like the madam’s anger towards my parents...”

“You have not done anything wrong.”

“I did not but I am my parents’ son.”

“No one should condemn a child for what their parents have done... and your parents have not done anything wrong, Wei Ying.”

“I know. Shushu said the same thing. Gods! It was even the first time that I met the madam!”

Lan Wangji slowly and very carefully removed Wei Wuxian’s hands from fiddling his jade token and placed both of them between his palms.

“Wei Ying...”

“Do we need to guess why Jiang-gongzi dislikes me so much?”

“Wei Ying.”

Wei Wuxian scoffed and then he shook his head.

“I can’t even remember or recall any memories of my parents if not because of shushu’s painting, shushu, shimu, and shifu’s stories, nainai’s contributions... I just... I just don’t get it,” he frustratingly sighed and then he chuckled when Zhan-tuzi moved from Lan Wangji’s lap to his.

“Ah, Zhan-tuzi comforting me, huh?”

“Wei Ying.”

“Why do they have to put us, their children... between such a fight? Is it even a fight when my parents are gone and never truly thought of dealing with the Jiangs? Do you know what Jiang-zongzhu told me when shifu fetched me to talk to him in Qishan?”

Lan Wangji had an idea that his father made Wei Wuxian meet Jiang Fengmian which resulted in his actions when he returned to their guest quarters.

He shook his head.

“Shifu asked me countless times outside the door if I was sure that I wanted to talk to him. I was excited of course... I wanted to talk to someone who could be considered the closest to my a-die... but he... but he...” Wei Wuxian closed his eyes as he took a deep breath.

“Shushu assured me that he would never – *never* allow anyone to take me away from here.”

The statement made Lan Wangji stiffen as he pressed Wei Wuxian’s hands tighter and even pulled it closer to his chest. This made Wei Wuxian laugh.

“He offered me to go to Lotus Pier.”

“I was told that my father used to be your subordinate, Jiang-zongzhu.”

“That is right, Wei Ying. He was our head disciple, my second in command.”

Wei Wuxian nodded. He was not used to hearing his birth name spoken by other people than the Lans.

“He grew up in Yunmeng with me. We did things together and attended the lectures in Gusu as well. That is where – that is where he -- we met Cangse.”

“Ah, yes, Jiang-zongzhu, shushu told me about it,” he smiled.

“Shushu... Lan Qiren is your guardian?”

“Yes, zongzhu. Shushu took me as his ward and has been taking good care of me since I was four.”

“He found you?”

“Yes, zongzhu. He found me in Caiyi and took me to Cloud Recesses where I healed.”

“Healed?”

“I was sick when shushu found me.”

“I am sorry to hear that.”

“It’s alright. I have healed and grew stronger than ever. Shushu made sure I become healthy!”

There was an emotion that passed Jiang Fengmian’s face that Wei Wuxian cannot name.

“You – you are truly close.”

“With shushu? Yes, Jiang-zongzhu. He is the first parent –father figure I had the moment I opened my eyes in Cloud Recesses.”

“Are you – are you happy there?”

“In Cloud Recesses? In Gusu-Lan? Yes, very much. I think that a-die and a-niang are happy to know that I am happy too.”

Jiang Fengmian pulled his lips into a thin line. Silence enveloped them until the Sect Leader spoke again.

“How about coming to Lotus Pier, Wei Ying?”

“Lotus Pier?”

“Yes, my home. I – I tried looking for you when I – when I heard about your parents. I wanted to take good care of you in their name but it seems like Lan Qiren found you first.”

Wei Wuxian was shocked by his words. He has noticed the lingering glances of the Jiang Sect Leader to him throughout the conference. He chose to be respectful and give him a bow but he never truly paid attention. The sudden offer surprised him.

“To visit?” he asked.

Jiang Fengmian looked at him from head down to where the table covers his lower body and then shook his head.

“To be a disciple of our sect like your father was before. To make Lotus Pier your home too. I can talk to Lan Qiren – to Qinghengjun about it. I am sure that they would allow it if you want to. I could – I could introduce to you to things that your father used to do, enjoyed doing when he was in Yunmeng-Jiang.”

Wei Wuxian found himself gripping his knuckles under the table as the Sect Leader continued talking.

“I have a son, Jiang Cheng, he is the same age as you. I introduced him to you after the competition. You could be friends! I have a daughter too, a few years older and she’d love to meet you too. Lotus Pier is a lot different than Cloud Recesses but you’ll like it there.”

He made his voice sounding enthusiastic and inviting but Wei Wuxian does not know why but he found himself shaking his head before the Jiang Sect Leader could continue talking.

“Wei Ying?”

“I’m sorry, Jiang-zongzhu but I don’t think that is possible.”

“Why? I can talk to them if you want to.”

Wei Wuxian shook his head again.

“With all due respect, Jiang-zongzhu but that is the thing. I thank you for the invitation but I respectfully decline your offer.” He attempted to stand up to bow but Jiang Fengmian stopped him.

“Wei Ying.”

“I would love to visit Lotus Pier one day, Jiang-zongzhu but my home is Cloud Recesses and I am a Gusu-Lan disciple,” he gently touched his forehead ribbon that belongs to the main clan.

“I hope that Jiang-zongzhu considered that before he gave me the offer. I mean no disrespect... it’s just that...”

And his words seemed to have hit Jiang Fengmian to realization as he shook his head, his face turning red.

“No-no, I understand. I am sorry, Wei Ying, I was not thinking. I was just – I was just taken over my emotions of seeing you and knowing that you’re alive. I was made believe that you also died...”

“Jiang-zongzhu.”

Jiang Fengmian sighed, looking embarrassed of what he just did.

“I know that you see Cloud Recesses as your home. I just hope that you would give Lotus Pier a chance. I can talk to Lan Qiren and Qinghengjun if one day, you decide to come over, Wei Ying.”

Wei Wuxian took a deep breath and nodded.

“I’ll let you know, zongzhu. Thank you.”

“I’ll make sure to introduce you to things that Changze liked and even learn our techniques as an honorary disciple. Lotus Pier is a lot warmer than Cloud Recesses but I am sure you’ll like the lotuses. Changze and I liked picking lotus pods and eating seeds.”

“That would be lovely, zongzhu. I’ll let you know.”

And Wei Wuxian never thought he'll ever reach a point where he'd want a conversation to end immediately. He was so thankful that his shifu knocked and told them that it was time for dinner.

“Wei Ying.”

“After what happened with the madam, I'd never dream of stepping on Lotus Pier unless it is needed... besides, shifu would not send any Gusu-Lan disciple in Yunmeng.”

“Wei Ying.”

“Aiyoo, that face, Lan Zhan! I'm not leaving, you know that right?”

“Mn.”

Wei Wuxian removed his hands from his hold to touch his arm.

“I'd rather handstand for 24 hours than ever think of going there,” he snickered when Lan Wangji's lips pouted.

“And you do know that there's *seriously* nothing between me and Jin-gongzi like what Jiang Wanyin tried to say, right?”

He refuses to call him young master anymore. He has been calling him with his name (and it usually sounded like spoken with spite but he always lets it pass) so now, he'll also call him the way he does.

“Mn. I know.”

“Good. I don't want to smell any vinegar-“

“Wei Ying!”

“Aiyaah! There are your ears again!”

“Wei Ying,” Wangji held both of his hands once more and this time, he softly kissed his knuckles which made Wei Wuxian gasp, his entire face turning red.

“Lan Zhan.”

“Would not allow them to take Wei Ying. Would not allow them to hurt *my* Wei Ying.”

“I know, *my* Lan Zhan is the best!”

Wei Wuxian could feel his entire face on fire as he moved forward to hug him. They are used to sharing a hug since they were young but there are certain hugs that cause both of them to blush and this is one of them.

“Lan Zhan.”

“Wei Ying?”

“At the end of the lectures?”

A pause.

“Mn.”

“Okay.”

“Mn.”

And Wangji pulled him closer to his embrace until they felt two fluff balls squirming on their laps which made them pull apart. The other bunnies were scattered around while Zhan-tuzi and Ying-tuzi were obviously demanding their attention.

Wei Wuxian scrunched his nose as he lifted Zhan-tuzi to face him.

“Do I smell vinegar from you, Zhan-tuzi? Are you jealous of Lan Zhan, hm?”

“Wei Ying!”

Wei Wuxian’s carefree laughter that they missed yesterday was once again heard.

No one would want to admit it but the rest of the lectures felt *lighter* without the constant heaviness of Jiang Wanyin’s aura when he’s around. Not once have they seen him smile. He was scowling most of the time, bossy, and obviously has his attention to whatever Wei Wuxian was doing. It was no longer a secret that he seemed to want to win against Wei Wuxian but he constantly fails.

Jiang Yanli’s warm personality and the friendly Jiang disciples were missed though.

Jin Zixuan was also trying to not cross paths with Wei Wuxian which just made him laugh.

“It’s not my fault he easily gets flustered over... I don’t know. Let him be.”

Though at the end of the lectures where they were to send off the students who successfully completed their guest disciple lectures, Wei Wuxian approached him.

“It was nice knowing you, Jin-gongzi. I hope to meet Little Gold again one day.”

“It was nice knowing you too, Wei-gongzi. You can meet Little Gold and our other spiritual dogs someday.”

“I look forward to that. Safe journey, Jin-gongzi.”

Nie Huaisang, who did not stop until he was able to make sure that he got into Wen Qing’s good books, made a swift twirl in front of his best friends.

“So,” he batted his brows.

“Let me guess... you’re going to Dafan?”

“Not yet! But! I was able to invite Wen-xiong to Qinghe for my next play. Visiting their home will be the next thing on the list after that.”

Wei Wuxian laughed as he shook his head.

“Have you seen Wen-guniang’s needles? I saw it once and it scared the hell out of me!”

“Well, I just-“ Nie Huaisang winked. They both laughed as Wei Wuxian shoved him. Lan Wangji settled on standing beside them, observing and listening.

Nie Huaisang left with the rest of the Nie disciples with an impressive grade, all thanks to the group studies they had where Wei Wuxian found ways to help students absorb lessons according to their learning capability. Lan Wangji was a willing assistant.

“Wen-xiong, Wen-guniang, we hope that your stay in Cloud Recesses was worth it.”

“It was, thank you for your hospitality, Wei-gongzi, Lan-er-gongzi.”

“Thank you for attending our lectures.”

They exchanged bows.

“Wen-xiong, you’re coming to Qinghe for the play?”

“Yes, Wei-xiong... jiejie allowed me,” Wen Qionglin replied with a smile. His stay in Cloud Recesses and getting acquainted with Nie Huaisang has surely helped him get out of his shell a little.

“That’s good-that’s good. We’ll see you there and I hope that Wen-guniang could also come! I’ll see you when we happen to have a night hunt around Dafan, yes?”

“Of course, Wei-xiong. I’ll look forward to your and Ji-xiong’s visit,” Wen Qionglin shyly looked at Lan Wangji who hummed as he nodded. He doesn’t think he’ll ever get over his

first impression of the Second Jade – stoic and strict even if he has seen his rare smiles and tender personality especially when it's towards Wei Wuxian.

“And send me letters, not just Nie-xiong! I reply far better and faster than him!”

Wen Qionglin blushed, “I would, I promise.”

“Good.”

Wei Wuxian noticed that Wen Qing has been very *secretive* the whole time and she does not usually stay in their guest quarters. He and Lan Wangji saw her several times in the back hills and they thought that she was visiting the bunnies if she ever saw them. They once found an injured bunny with a perfectly bandaged leg and they doubt it was done by anyone who randomly came to the back hills.

When they had sent off the rest of the guest disciples, Wei Wuxian became busy with reinforcing wards and checking on their security measures.

Lan Wangji on the other hand had to work with his brother on his task. Since he was a kid, he noticed how they would usually share responsibilities and as he grew older, he somehow realized why.

He never thought he'll be someone keen on politics but his father made things easy for him and his brother that somehow... he knows... he knows that they are preparing *him* more than his brother who is already a skilled diplomat even at a young age.

“Xiongzhang,” Wangji called his brother's attention while they were busy reading through important papers that they needed to consolidate.

“Wangji?”

Lan Wangji was not sure how to continue. He can imagine that one day, they will be sending his brother off to Unclean Realm. Heaven knows how long he and Nie Mingjue has been courting. Their mother even sends chaperones to them sometimes.

“I am doing it after dinner,” he finally said and that instantly made Lan Xichen stop whatever he was doing as he looked up to meet his eyes, a huge smile plastered on his face.

“Oh, didi!”

Lan Wangji felt his ears burn as he looked down, unable to look at his brother's shining smile any longer without feeling his entire face on fire.

“Have you prepared your courting gifts?”

“Mn.”

“Well, aside from the comb you gave A-Xian when we were kids.”

Lan Wangji wanted to bring his head lower if he could. He did not truly know what the meaning of giving a comb was. Then came Nie Huaisang and his endless love for poetry, lyrics, and other literary works that usually focus on romance. That was when he knew that a comb is one of the common and courting gifts.

They have been giving each other courting gifts with or without acknowledging it.

Hairpins, handmade purses, even handkerchief with embroidery as it is one of Liu Meiyue’s hobbies and so she taught them when they gave an interest in what she was doing.

Lan Wangji took out something from his sleeves and placed it on the table. Lan Xichen looked at the qiankun pouch and then back to his brother.

“I have procured the books of Wei Ying’s favorite writer. They are rare and have not been reproduced lately. Wei Ying has been hoping to find them when we go on night hunts.”

Lan Xichen smiled as he took the qiankun pouch and with a wave of a hand, the books showed up on the table between them.

“Oh, Wangji, this is lovely! A-Xian will cry seeing this!”

“Xiongzhang.”

“Giving him rare literary books of Qian Suiyou that consists of his poems, lyrics, and scripts that he submits to different troupes for them to perform. They vary on themes but the lasts ones that were heard consist of confession of his love and devotion especially to his *rumored* muse, the bounty hunter.”

Wangji looked at his brother in surprise.

“Xiongzhang knows this?”

Lan Xichen just laughed as he returned the books inside the pouch.

“I have been to Unclean Realm a lot of times, A-Sang kept on talking poetry about his favorite writers and...” Lan Xichen looked at him with mirth in his eyes. “Didi, A-Xian usually talks to me about literature more than he does to you so...”

Lan Wangji looked down again, ears getting redder and redder as their conversation continues. He kept the pouch in his sleeves once more. He likes reading books but he does not have much talent with romantic literature... aside from making a song... that will also be his gift but would want *his Wei Ying* to be the first one to hear. He made it into a duet between a qin and a dizi and he purposely did not finish the song. He would want to finish it with *his Wei Ying*’s help. It will be a song that they both made.

“Just tell me if you need any help, okay?”

“Thank you, xiongzhong.”

“Anytime, Wangji.”

“And xiongzhong.”

“Yes?”

“Xiongzhong can tell me if he needs any help too.”

Lan Xichen smiled as he nodded. He knows that.

They resumed working.

“Shufu, I would like to ask for your permission to formally offer courtship with the intention of marriage to your ward, the Third Jade of Lan, Wei Ying courtesy name Wuxian.”

As it was Wangji, it came out too formal and received a few moments of silence and then...

Liu Meiyue cried tears of happiness.

Lan Qijun nodded approvingly, expecting this to happen *soon*.

Lan Qiren choked on his tea, turned red, purple, and then he finally nodded.

Lan Xichen comforted their mother as he beamed as the two tied their ribbons to each other's wrists to complete the acceptance of courting, a Gusu-Lan ritual.

And as Lan Xichen predicted, Wei Wuxian cried the moment Lan Wangji handed him the qiankun pouch and then he threw himself to Wangji's arms for a tight hug.

Wei Wuxian knew that they agreed to make it official once the guest lectures were over... but he did not expect it to be this *soon* though he'll never complain of course.

“Aaaah! I love you, Lan Zhan!”

“I love you too, Wei Ying.”

Lan Xichen had to refill their uncle's teacup and made sure that he won't be choking anymore.

“It is time to have an official chaperone,” Lan Qiren did not even blink when he said that. Everyone in the room knows that he would personally choose and won't allow the two to do

anything promiscuous before the wedding. Lan Qiren will make sure of it.

Yu Ziyuan could still feel anger rising inside her each time she recalls what happened in Cloud Recesses.

She was already seeing red on their way to Gusu but what her husband told her actually reminded her of her pride as well as the remaining pride of Yunmeng-Jiang after whatever their son did. Of course, she could still feel that Wei Wuxian had involvement in everything but her and her sect's name, their pride, their dignity is still important.

And so she conceded and decided to *try* and control herself. She'll see what happened and see her next course of action.

She was so mad with the feedback given to them about Yunmeng-Jiang disciples especially her precious son whom she worked hard to train to be ready to face the other young masters. How could her training be not enough? What else lacks? What else could she do? The thought woke Zidian several times in front of the Lans but as she told Jiang Fengmian, *she tried* to control.

Even during the time Jiang Fengmian asked Jin Guangshan to break the betrothal and wait until both of their children are *mature enough* for marriage got her angry. She already made up her mind to give Jiang Fengmian a piece of her mind once they return to Yunmeng-Jiang. It was her and Li Shiyu's promise, it was their agreement, how could their husbands break it right in front of her?

But the presence of the Lans made her bite her tongue. She does not wish for *others* to *see* her marital issues with Jiang Fengmian. It should just happen and remain in Lotus Pier.

Then her son told her about what he has been witnessing between Jin Zixuan and Wei Wuxian.

That was the last straw.

She did not see the brat when they arrived but the moment she saw him looking the same as Wei Ying in her *visions* of her *alternate life*, Yu Ziyuan saw red and the next thing she knew, she had unleashed Zidian.

She has seen how Lan Qiren was a cultivator when they were students. He was *passable* – skilled – no, master of the six arts, had a high level of cultivation and ranked third among the young masters of their generation. Yet she also knows that he is someone who never truly engaged with actual night hunts unless they were required and she seldom heard his name outside Gusu.

Feeling his overflowing spiritual energy and the way he was able to pull Zidian from her wrist has truly shocked her. Even in her *visions* of her *alternate life*, she never saw Lan Qiren show such skills. She knows that Lans focuses on teachings and meditations but it seems like – it seems like she underestimated how Lan Qiren does it. It was the first time that Zidian was ever pulled from her wrist by someone outside Meishan-Yu ever since she became its master.

“You are speaking as if you know our *Wei Ying* more than we do.”

When Liu Meiyue spoke those words, she was close to telling her that she has no idea what she was talking about. She *raised* that brat in her *visions* of her *alternate life*. She also made sure he becomes a *great* cultivator so he won’t be ruining the name of Yunmeng-Jiang and that must be one of her greatest regrets in that *alternate life* of hers. If she did not do that and made the brat remain a servant like his father, then he wouldn’t have been anyone significant in her *visions*.

She knew that no one used a spell on her because she’ll know. She has been on the receiving end of the infamous Gusu-Lan silencing spell when she was still a student after she tried to argue against Cangse Sanren. Yet the whole time they were talking about Qinghengjun’s decision against her actions... she did could not find her voice. The lack of Zidian on her wrist as it was placed right in front of Qinghengjun was also something that was affecting her.

She was already making mental notes of the things she had to do once they reach Lotus Pier. She would not allow any of her disciples to stay in Cloud Recesses anymore. This place... will eventually go to ruins anyway. With how they protect that brat, they would see their end like how she saw it in her *visions* of her *alternate life*.

She did not talk to anyone after they left Cloud Recesses. Zidian kept on crackling on her wrist, feeling every emotion she was having.

The moment the boat docked in Lotus Pier, she instructed everyone to go to the Ancestral Hall to kneel. She has a copy of the student feedback from Cloud Recesses. Every negative effect of their actions during the lectures was equivalent to twenty laps around the Pier.

“I expected you to do well! HOW COULD YOU DESTROY OUR NAME LIKE THAT?!”

“A-niang, I was trying my best!”

“It was not enough, A-Cheng! How could you lose against Wei Wuxian in a duel?!”

“A-niang-“

“No! I do not need any of your reasons. No slacking, you are going to train until you could have a breakthrough with your cultivation! I do not need you to get distracted, do you understand?!”

“Yes, a-niang.”

“A-Li!”

“A-niang-“

“How could you do so poorly during sword practice? The swordmaster wrote a long list of things where you failed! I am calling another Yu senior disciple to train with you – no, better yet, I should send you to Meishan.”

“But a-niang-“

“Then train properly!”

“Yes, a-niang.”

“San-niang.”

“Fengmian, if you think I have forgiven you with what you did on A-Li’s engagement-“

“San-niang, I think that we should be talking about what you did to Wei Ying more than-“

“So it’s about that brat again?! When are you going to see your children instead of that brat?! He is not ours! He does not belong here so let Gusu-Lan deal with him!”

“It is the fact that I see *our* children that is why I broke the engagement. I do not wish for A-Li to be stuck in a marriage with someone who barely recognizes her presence.”

“Are you pointing out something, Fengmian?!“

“No, san-niang. I am just saying that our daughter deserves to be in a marriage where she is loved and appreciated.”

“There is no such thing as that, Fengmian.”

“You know that is not true, san-niang. There are marriages-“

“Well, it does not last. It does not happen so stop!”

“San-niang.”

“Perhaps it is better for now until Li Shiyu’s son figures out that he cannot be a cut sleeve like that brat.”

“San-niang!”

“Are you raising your voice to me now, Fengmian?!“

“San-niang, control yourself!”

“I did!”

“And yet look at what happened-“

He was cut off when Zidian crackled loudly, Yu Ziyuan’s qi began to surround his office.

“I know where I went wrong so you do not have to rub it on my face, Fengmian. But do not show me how much you *worry* about that brat more than our own children. If you only looked at them then perhaps, we did not have to go to Gusu at all.”

“San-niang, why do you insist that I do not look at *our* children? I always put A-Li and A-Cheng first.”

“Then stop mentioning that brat and be a father that our children need! Who cares if Gusu-Lan does not step a foot in Yunmeng?! Yunmeng-Jiang is extremely capable of handling our business. Who cares if Gusu-Lan threatens to end their connections with us?! We could stand on our own, Meishan-Yu is with us! Who cares if you’re the only one who could enter Cloud Recesses? Our children, disciples, and I do not need to step on such a fake and useless place!”

Jiang Fengmian did not reply as he was stunned by his wife’s words.

“San-niang...”

“I am leaving for a hunt with Jinzhu and Yinzhu. I expect A-Li and A-Cheng to be close on having a breakthrough with their cultivation on my return.”

Jiang Fengmian was left standing on the spot when his wife turned around, stomping her way out of his office.

“Then stop mentioning that brat and be a father that our children need!”

And yet between the two of them, it was her who does not stop mentioning Wei Ying.

Jiang Fengmian closed his eyes as he took a deep breath.

“San-niang, this is the reason why I wished to end A-Li’s marriage. I do not want our kind daughter to be stuck in a marriage like ours. What else do I have to do to make you believe that I still chose you in the end? San-niang...”

Months passed and life continued in Lotus Pier. They heard stories about the end of the Gusu-Lan lectures which received a lot of positive feedbacks from different sects. Yu Ziyuan just rolled her eyes hearing it.

What angered her the most were the stories about her son and his attitude during the lectures. His actions, especially towards the Third Jade was a topic among young cultivators too.

“How are they compare A-Cheng to that brat?!”

“Yu-“

“Out of my way!”

And the day ended with the training field looking like a storm passed because of Zidian and Yu Ziyuan’s wrath due to whatever her reason is to be that mad.

The mention of Jiang Wanyin’s expulsion was also notable and people would stop talking when they hear Zidian crackling on her wrist.

“You see what you have done?! Redeem yourself!”

“Yes, a-niang.”

She drilled her disciples, especially her children into focusing on their cultivation. A-Li can somehow get a hold of her sword longer now.

Of course, she heard about how other young disciples trying to avoid crossing paths with her son and she thinks that that is a *good* thing. People avoid her as the Violet Spider and it helped her established the *reputation* of being untouchable. It also helped her find better prey on night hunts that becomes the talk of the town once she finishes it off.

She also sends A-Cheng to lead night hunts with their disciples and takes pride when they return victorious and with a hefty payment. She also made sure to let those achievements spread. It is time for people to hear about the young master of the Yunmeng-Jiang Sect and not just the *useless* rumors that came out after the *equally useless* Gusu-Lan lectures.

Yu Ziyuan made sure to have Jinzhu and Yinzhu hire people to spread about her son’s *achievements* far greater than where the rumors about Jiang Wanyin have spread.

Her husband... is there. He has been making his presence felt but she still thinks that it is not enough. He trains A-Li with her sword and peels lotus seeds with her.

“A-Li, did you know that your yeye used to be very strict with the method of picking the pods and peeling the seeds? It must start with this – and then this... then –“

Yu Ziyuan thinks that it is a waste of time. She never truly liked peeling them when she got people who could peel the seeds for her. Though as long as A-Li improves with her cultivation, she won’t step in no matter how many seeds she would want to peel.

Then one day, Jiang Fengmian came with a puppy.

“Fengmian!”

“San-niang.”

“What is that?!”

“A puppy for A-Cheng. He has been doing well so I wanted to give him a gift. Princess is getting old and would surely want a new playmate-“

“Fengmian! Don’t you get it?! Those puppies were distracting him that is why we assigned servants to look after them so he could focus on training!”

“San-niang, that is why we lost the other two. This time, A-Cheng could learn how to balance his time between taking good care of his dogs and cultivation.”

“You know that it will not happen. He will get distracted-“

“This will be good training for him to learn how to weigh his priorities. As a future sect leader, it is something that he needs to do most of the time.”

Yu Ziyuan’s eyes narrowed at the puppy and then to her husband.

“We’re getting rid of it once he gets distracted.”

“Okay, san-niang.”

Her son beamed as if he achieved a breakthrough with his cultivation the moment he got the puppy on his arm. He named it Fairy. Yu Ziyuan rolled her eyes. As long as A-Cheng does not get distracted, then the puppy could stay.

Now, she needs to focus on her unruly disciples. They cannot ruin their sect name against the other sects for being mediocre. Yu Ziyuan would not allow that. Then later, she’ll go to night hunt again, bringing Violet Spider’s title on greater lands.

Then a news came.

Nie Mingjue and Lan Xichen’s long-standing betrothal was just announced now.

“As both parties are heirs of their respective sects, there were a lot of things to consider and prepare before we could officially make an announcement.”

They called it a love match.

Yu Ziyuan does not know which part of the announcement she'll *cringe* so she does not react.

It was said that to *avoid* Conflict of Interest, Lan Wangji has accepted the position of being the sect heir while Lan Xichen marries out to Qinghe-Nie. Lan Xichen will be Lan Wangji's chief adviser once he inherits the position. It was said to be Lan Wangji's only condition on allowing his brother to marry out and accepting his position.

Yu Ziyuan scoffed.

Of course, she has heard about the second young master of Qinghe-Nie. Spoiled by Nie Yongwu and Nie Mingyu and allowed to *do the things he wants* and that is to write and direct plays that are becoming famous in Qinghe. Yu Ziyuan cannot imagine giving such *luxury* to her children. She felt shivers at the thought of her children missing training for some... useless things.

It is only wise for them to let Lan Xichen marry out instead of Nie Mingjue. She does not know how (why) Nie Yongwu *lived longer* in her *present* compared to the *visions* of her *alternate life*. She does not truly care what happens to both sects but she knows that Nie Yongwu might really meet his end if their sect actually ends up in his youngest son's hands. After all, she has seen the boy a few times when she went to Unclean Realm.

But she knows that it was a good political move. Yunmeng-Jiang and Lanling-Jin have lost their potential alliance due to the broken betrothal. She still aims to reinstate the betrothal in the future. She has talked to this with her sworn sister who agreed.

I understand, Ziyuan. I have given Guangshan a piece of my mind for their decision. I have also reprimanded A-Xuan for what he said about A-Li.

But Ziyuan, what is this I heard from our disciples that your son called my son a cut sleeve? I would like to hear your side regarding this. I do not wish to hear ill rumors about my son, especially one made from your son's words. I know you understand what I mean.

For the betrothal, we can wait for them to grow older and reinstate it. By that time, they would not have any choice but to get married.

She had to properly word her reply, stating that it was *carelessness* on her son's part and "***will never be repeated again. I have talked to A-Cheng already.***" She also warned her not to let Jin Zixuan associate with that brat.

Li Shiyu did not send a reply and Yu Ziyuan did not mind.

For now, she would focus on looking for a match for her only son.

“Jinzhu, book me an appointment with all the matchmakers in Yunmeng capital.”

“For Jiang-gongzi, Yu-furen?”

“Yes. It is time to build another alliance. I only want the best woman for my son.”

She does not care about how people would react to the cut sleeve relationship that the two great sects just announced. She'll let them take the burnt for such a move.

Yet three months later, Jiang Wanyin was blacklisted by every matchmaker not just in Yunmeng capital but all over Yunmeng territory.

The *love match* between Nie Mingjue and Lan Xichen was greatly accepted, claiming that Chifengzun and Zewujun would be a force to reckon with once they lead Qinghe-Nie.

Yu Ziyuan lashed out her anger and disappointment to seven new dummies.

She wanted to refuse.

She does not want to pretend like she enjoys these tea parties that Li Shiyu or Nie Mingyu organizes for the *five madams of the five great sects*.

She does not wish to see Liu Meiyue.

But Yu Ziyuan is not weak. She is not someone who avoids people just because of whatever occurred between them. She even witnessed Cangse Sanren and Wei Changze's wedding even if she could not stand their presence, especially that woman.

And so Yu Ziyuan decided to come.

However, on her way to Koi Tower, she heard some very disturbing stories that she regretted dropping by the market as she hoped to night hunt. She does not wish to stay in the Koi Tower any longer. She wanted to listen to stories that could lead her to a night hunt in Lanling after the tea party.

Instead, she heard stories about three esteemed young masters and two spiritual dogs. They were Jin Zixuan, Lan Wangji, and Wei Wuxian.

The story went like this: Jin-gongzi came from a personal night hunt with his two spiritual dogs when he passed by a village that was attacked by mountain demons. He offered help but he was overpowered until two cultivators in white and blue arrived for his aid. They finished off the night hunt and saved the village from their problem. The spiritual dogs named Little Gold and Little Peony gave so much help as well. The three cultivators were seen traveling for a short while and killed some resentful entities in the Phoenix Mountain.

When she arrived in Koi Tower, she stormed into the veranda where they would usually do their tea party. Li Shiyu, Wen Yu, and Nie Mingyu were already there.

“Ah, Ziyuan, you’re here! Lan-furen sent a message that she might be late by half an hour due to an unfortunate encounter with an imp. Everything is sorted out and she just needs to finish it up.” Li Shiyu said.

Yu Ziyuan did not mind it as she sat down.

“Why did your son go on a night hunt with that brat?”

Instead of being surprised, Li Shiyu looked delighted as she dampened the napkin at the corners of her lips.

“You heard? Ah, it must have been quite a story. The village chief was just supposed to send to Lanling-Jin for assistance but A-Xuan happened to pass by and his spiritual dogs were reacting to it so he went to check. Coincidentally, Lan-er-gongzi and Wei-gongzi heard about it while they were scouting so they came!”

“And you let it happen?!”

“Ziyuan? I did not let it happen because I did not know it in the first place. A-Xuan came from a personal night hunt before that.”

“You do know what A-Cheng said, right?!”

“Ziyuan! You are not to discuss that in front of my guests!” the way Li Shiyu’s hands turned into fists was immediately noticed.

“You said it was due to your son's *carelessness*. Is mentioning it now due to your carelessness too?” Li Shiyu's tone of voice changed as she glanced at Wen Yu and Nie Mingyu who were trying to catch up with their conversation.

“I told you not to allow your son to associate with that brat! He is nothing but trouble! Shiyu, you better stop your son-“

“Ziyuan! Who are you to tell me what to do with my son when you cannot even control yours?!”

“Li Shiyu! Because I am telling the truth! That brat-“

“We warned you, Jiang-furen.”

Four pairs of eyes turned to the entrance to see Liu Meiyue, still looking pristine and elegant despite encountering an emergency night hunt earlier.

“Lan-furen-“

“We warned you,” Liu Meiyue just nodded her head to the rest and did not wait for Li Shiyu to continue as she focused her attention on Yu Ziyuan.

She arrived by the time Yu Ziyuan was questioning Li Shiyu for allowing her son to night hunt with Wei Wuxian.

“What is going on?” Wen Yu asked, obviously feeling the shift of atmosphere around them.

“Perhaps, we could talk about this ?” Li Shiyu offered as she raised her brow to her sworn sister but Liu Meiyue’s attention was still with Yu Ziyuan.

“I told you, that brat –“

“His name is Wei Wuxian and not once has he ever been a brat so stop calling him one, Jiang-furen! I do not even know why you kept on calling him names when you barely know him!”

“Wei-gongzi?” Wen Yu clarified as she glanced at Nie Mingyu who had her eyes narrowed at Yu Ziyuan as well. They know how fond the Madam of the Nie Sect is to the young masters of the Lan Sect. The announcement of the betrothal between Nie Mingjue and Lan Xichen strengthened the ties between the two sects.

“You have no idea, Lan-furen.”

“Then again, we warned you, didn’t we? But it seems like this will not be settled with a simple warning.”

“You-“

“I propose a duel.”

Silence enveloped the veranda when those words came out of Liu Meiyue.

“Between you and me, a duel. You win, tell me what you want, I win, I’ll tell you what I want.”

Zidian crackled.

An ominous aura surrounded the two madams.

Yu Ziyuan is not one to back out on duels. Meishan-Yu made sure of that. With eyes narrowing at Liu Meiyue, she stood up.

“I accept.”

The other three madams were lost and confused. They came for tea, share stories, *gossip*, and discuss random things. How did they end up needing to mediate a duel between the other two madams? One is known to have gone to seclusion after her marriage but is now famous for being one of the best Lan-furen Gusu ever had. The other one is known to be the Violet Spider, known for her whip, her attitude, and her competence.

Since Yu Ziyuan is sworn sisters with Li Shiyu, they cannot do it in Lanling. The betrothal of Nie Mingjue and Lan Xichen would stand as an alliance between Qinghe-Nie and Gusu-Lan and so they cannot do it in Qinghe.

As the five sworn secrecy over the duel, they cannot do it somewhere where people would see them but they would need a place that could stand as a neutral ground between the two parties.

In the end, Wen Yu offered for the fight to happen at Qiongqi Path. All parties agreed.

Yu Ziyuan would not allow herself to lose. The only thing she knows about Liu Meiyue as a cultivator is the fact that she is a rogue and that is how she met Qinghengjun. She has not heard a lot of things about her prowess but she has seen her sword. She could feel that it is powerful just like her core. She knows one thing about rogue cultivators though – they have a lot of tricks in their pockets as they never got formal training on cultivation sects. They’d be lucky to have other rogue cultivators or masters that would willingly teach them cultivation.

But Yu Ziyuan is not Violet Spider for nothing. She prepared and did not mind the questioning looks with how she has been destroying dummy after dummy just to practice with her whip.

She also sparred with her son only to be disappointed with how he kept on losing.

“How can you fight if you are this weak? Are you getting too distracted by your dogs again?!”

“A-niang, no! I’ll do better!”

“You said that earlier too! Have you heard of how Jin Zixuan, Lan Wangji, and that brat killed countless mountain demons, those damn resentful entities, and how people are talking about it until now?! Do you think your achievements are enough?! No! Again!”

With gritted teeth, Jiang Wanyin raised Sandu once more.

Jiang Yanli watched from the side and then she sighed. She headed to the kitchen with the thought of cooking soup for her brother to eat once his training ends.

When Jiang Fengmian emerged from his office after a long day's work, he was surprised to receive a report that eight new dummies were destroyed by his wife.

“Have ten new ones delivered and installed by tomorrow afternoon. Tell them to make twenty new more and keep it until we ask for it.”

“Duly noted, Jiang-zongzhu.”

Jiang Fengmian could only take a deep breath as he shook his head before he resigned to his chamber to get a nap.

The day of the duel came in the guise of another *tea party* .

The five madams arrived in the Qiongqi Path clad in their respective sect colors.

“You win, tell me what you want, I win, I’ll tell you what I want,” Liu Meiyue repeated her words.

Yu Ziyuan just scoffed as she gripped her knuckles, Zidian woke. She definitely knew what she’ll ask her to do later. That brat must be -

Then Liu Meiyue unsheathed her sword, strong spiritual energy was immediately felt. Yu Ziyuan did not let herself be affected.

The three madams watched from the safe area with bated breaths. They only got the gist of the reason why the two are going to fight.

Something happened at Cloud Recesses that caused Gusu-Lan to give a warning to Yunmeng-Jiang. It involves Wei Wuxian – Wei Changze and Cangse Sanren’s son, Lan Qiren’s precious and prized ward. Yu Ziyuan holds a great hostility towards the disciple while Liu Meiyue is being protective of her own. That’s it.

Each time Zidian’s whip touches Liu Meiyue’s sword, a strong ripple of spiritual energy comes out. The purple spiritual energy reacts against the pinkish-white spiritual energy of Liu Meiyue. It is obvious that both madams are powerful and capable, not allowing each other to reign a blow. One blow gets an immediate strong response.

With gritted teeth, Yu Ziyuan recalled Zidian and unleashed it with so much force. She must admit, this is the first time she has fought with someone who is this capable... this powerful. She did not underestimate her but it seems like the Madam of the Lan Sect has exceeded her expectations.

The fight continued.

After this day, Yu Ziyuan will regret the move she just did. She did not see what Liu Meiyue did after she landed but Yu Ziyuan felt a strong tug on her wrist and the next thing she knew, Zidian was removed from her and is now on the tip of Liu Meiyue's sword.

It was a much greater tug than the way Lan Qiren pulled Zidian from her in Gusu.

Liu Meiyue tossed it in the air and it landed on the ground.

Yu Ziyuan saw red.

“Do you know Zhong-shifu?”

She watched as the white-clad cultivator moved forward.

“Liu Meiyue! How dare you?!”

“He forged Zidian and a lot of spiritual tools in Meishan-Yu!”

“Liu Meiyue!”

“He was my Shifu! He forged spiritual tools to protect innocents and fight evil. He never forged spiritual tools to be used against people out of spite, Yu Ziyuan. You do not deserve such a tool!”

“You!”

Yu Ziyuan's entire being was trembling as she moved her hand in the direction of Zidian, trying to summon it but Zidian did not react to her at all.

She did it again.

On the ground, Zidian sparked once and it stopped. A few moments later, smoke came out and it never reacted again.

She felt her entire body on fire, anger flowing all over her system. She finally unsheathed her sword. She cannot remember when was the last time she ever used her sword in a fight. Zidian has always been there.

Liu Meiyue fights well and is truly one with her sword. She may not be night hunting often but she crosses swords with her husband. It is their favorite bonding time and Lan Qijun never controls his force against his wife. He always shows that they are equal.

It shows with the way Liu Meiyue fights. She is unyielding, used to fight against someone powerful, her eyes glinting both with fury and confidence.

It ended with Yu Ziyuan dropping her sword, blood trickling down at the side of her neck with Liu Meiyue's sword against her.

Yu Ziyuan hissed.

"Three things, Yu Ziyuan," Liu Meiyue said, eyes meeting hers.

"Do not touch even a single hair of A-Ying or any of my family, which includes every Gusu disciple. No funny business and that includes spiking hatred of others, especially of your children towards mine--"

Yu Ziyuan tried to say something but Liu Meiyue just moved her body closer to her, her forearm against her chest. Yu Ziyuan bit her inner cheek at how strong Liu Meiyue's qi is, it was almost binding her on the ground.

"And lastly, focus on being a mother to your children instead of letting your envy... your jealousy to a dead person cloud your judgment against a child." With that, Liu Meiyue pushed Yu Ziyuan back as she took a step back. She sheathed her sword.

Yu Ziyuan did not know why she released a breath she did not know she was holding.

"You will regret having that child in your care, Liu Meiyue."

"I regret allowing myself to waste my time crossing swords against you."

"Liu Meiyue!"

"Yu Ziyuan!"

"You'll see your downfall because of that child."

"I'll see that child rise and live a happy life while I watch you destroy yourself for unfounded jealousy and spite."

Yu Ziyuan wanted another fight but she felt the blood trickling down her neck. She did not reach out to cover it and instead, she would let her core heal it later.

"You have children, be a mother they need in their lives. You have a husband, be a wife to him. You have a sect, be a furen they need. A-Ying is Gusu's responsibility, not yours so do not bother disturbing his life."

“You have no right to tell me what to do.”

“I just did, Yu Ziyuan.”

Liu Meiyue picked up Zidian on the ground and she expected her to toss it but Liu Meiyue moved forward and handed it to her.

Yu Ziyuan looked at Zidian and tried to send her spiritual energy to it but it did not wake at all. She suddenly heard a loud roaring in her head as she glared at Liu Meiyue.

“You destroyed my tool!”

“I did not do anything, Yu Ziyuan. You destroyed it yourself.”

“Liu Meiyue!”

“Zhong-shifu only had three disciples. The other two decided to follow his steps and forged tools for cultivators while I continued traveling and became a rogue,” Liu Meiyue sounded calm, a total opposite with how red Yu Ziyuan’s face is.

Liu Meiyue could see the three madams making their way to their battleground.

“On the day of his death, Zhong-shifu touched our swords and said that our swords will recognize the tools he forged,” she eyed Zidian before she looked at Yu Ziyuan again.

“Our swords will determine if the tools were used with the intention he had when he forged them. If they were not...” Liu Meiyue did not continue speaking as she narrowed her eyes to Zidian on Yu Ziyuan’s hand.

“I’ll say it once more.”

The three madams have reached where they stood with varying expressions and emotions on their faces. Liu Meiyue did not look at them as she focused her eyes on Yu Ziyuan.

“I did not do anything, Yu Ziyuan. *YOU* destroyed it yourself.”

With one respectful bow to the madams, Liu Meiyue unsheathed her sword once more and flew up the sky, pinkish-white glare following behind.

Chapter End Notes

Well... I think we're bidding goodbye to Zidian now👁👁
and will I let the opportunity pass without mentioning Qian Suiyou and his bounty

hunter? No, I won't 😊

Next chapter will include... what most of us have been waiting for 😊👁️😊

Oh and again, shamelessly promoting my rare pair fic just in case you have some time to waste for more reading hehe

New fic: [Brighter than Vermillion Light](#)

Be safe and have a nice day 💕

(PS: you guys have no idea how happy I am that I did not change the chapter count after I clicked add new chap for this fic 😊)

Chapter 6


Chapter Notes

Hello!

Yaaaay! Finally! An update~

This got delayed because I really just had to finish the other two fics and now I'm here~

Warning that... *a lot* of things happened in this chapter and well...

Thank you so much for reading, commenting, and leaving kudos, it means a lot to me 

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Rumors about Yu Ziyuan *losing* Zidian came out.

“What’s the worth of Violet Spider as a title when she cannot wield that spiritual tool anymore? How could she even lose it?!”

Yu Ziyuan was reacquainted with her sword. She destroyed dummy after dummy by slashing them back and forth, imagining them as her *enemies*.

Her family asked about the tool but she never told them what happened. It reached Meishan and she went to give a simple explanation.

“It got destroyed when I was fighting the entity. Zidian was removed from my wrist and the entity swallowed it whole though I was able to defeat it.”

Every lady of Meishan-Yu could only own more spiritual tools aside from their sword. The disappointment was visible on Sect Leader Yu’s face and Yu Ziyuan had to grit her teeth and clench her jaw. She was *never* a disappointment. This is all because of *that* Liu Meiyue and her protectiveness towards that brat.

After Liu Meiyue left that day, the other three Madams were look at her with... various expressions on their faces. Yu Ziyuan could not take it so she left without a word. She also *promised* herself that she would not be joining any tea parties anymore. She had enough.

She tried burning Zidian but it wouldn’t burn. In the end, she buried it somewhere no one will know since no one will be able to make use of it now. Her anger still boils each time she remembers the final spark of Zidian.

She would glare at anyone who mentions (or looks) at her bare wrist that once adorn a powerful jewelry and tool in one.

One day, she’ll make Liu Meiyue pay. Her, that brat, and perhaps, the entire Gusu-Lan Sect.

When the news came out that cultivators were banned from night hunting on *a lot* of territories, especially territories owned by the Wen Sect, Yu Ziyuan smirked.

She has seen it in her *visions* of her *alternate life*. She knows what this means.

It seems like... she does not need to do anything.

“Watch... watch as that brat brings your downfall.”

Yu Ziyuan poured herself a cup of tea as she looked at the lake from her pavilion’s window. Just then, she saw a boat with familiar passengers. She gripped her hand into a fist only to feel disappointed to not hear the usual crackle of Zidian, yet she still stood up.

“Who allows them to sail when it is time for training?! Are they slacking off again?!”

Yu Ziyuan stormed out of her pavilion, tea long forgotten as she started barking orders and punishments to the unknowing disciples.

Life continued in Cloud Recesses. Wei Wuxian and Lan Wangji focused on training the disciples while the others were busy preparing for Lan Xichen’s wedding. He has not stopped blushing and his eye smile has been a constant presence each time the wedding is discussed.

Nie Mingjue, the big man with a huge saber cannot hide his blush as well.

“You two are stinking in love!”

“You’re one to speak, A-Xian.”

“But da-ge! Lan Zhan and I are different!”

“Yeah, stinkier.”

“Da-ge!”

“Another one! Fight with the left hand again, you’re doing great with it.”

“I’m coming da-ge!”

The news of the Wens doing *things* was alarming as well. Minor sects were starting to either be eradicated or absorbed by the Wen Sect depending on how they would respond to Wen

Sect's demands.

For decades, the Wen Sect has been doing *questionable things* but no one really raised it as a concern. They all know the power of the Wen Sect and how the Xiandu would not forgive if they step out of the line.

But the oppression has been more alarming lately. No one knows what may happen next. A lot of sects have stopped their disciples to go on night hunts and opted to keep them in their territories.

Wei Wuxian noticed how Qinghengjun, Madam Lan, and even Lan Qiren were busier than usual. It is mostly attending to the needs of some territories in Gusu. Due to Wen Sect's demands, the three of them would rather go to night hunt and deal with restless spirits instead of letting disciples, even the senior ones go.

The three would take their time outside Cloud Recesses and would trust Lan Xichen, Lan Wangji, and Wei Wuxian to overlook everything. They will then return after a few days or a week at most. Sometimes, they would look tired but would assure them that they are fine. Lan Lan Xichen, Lan Wangji, and Wei Wuxian would then make sure that things are well in Cloud Recesses so the three of them do not need to worry about the sect while they cover for the job of the disciples outside.

The initial concern came to Cloud Recesses when Wei Wuxian and Lan Wangji returned a day before the lectures after they found out how the spiritual cognition of one of the Gusu-Lan disciples was removed while he was on a hunt.

They were advised not to be *alarmed* by what happened and were just told to be careful and so things continued in Cloud Recesses during the lectures.

When the Wen Sect started making demands, Gusu-Lan disciples were immediately advised not to leave especially when even allied sects were getting affected by what Qishan-Wen is trying to do.

There were rumors that even senior disciples from minor sects were made to answer to some Wen cultivators if they were caught night hunting. The three of them insisted on helping their parents but they would say no, especially when even Nie Zonghui was made to answer to a high-ranking Wen official after they crossed paths when he came from his night hunt near one of the Wen territories. Nie Yongwu was quick to send a missive to warn them.

Then on one random night after their usual tea and snacks in the Gentian House, Wei Wuxian felt a tug on his spiritual energy. He raised and waved his hand, knowing that his companions were watching him.

A fire communication talisman materialized. A signature communication talisman of the Wen Sect.

Xiandu planned an attack on Gusu.

He said that jiejie failed.

I do not know why.

Wen Xu will lead.

Be careful.

It was from Wen Qionglin.

The six people around the table of the Gentian House went silent for a moment.

And then six pairs of feet rustled in different directions of the Cloud Recesses.

The entire Cloud Recesses went on lockdown with enough supplies to last them for a year if needed.

When the attack came, the Wens did not stand a chance.

With Wei Wuxian's strong wards and countless alarms to alert them that the Wens were coming, as well as the hidden traps, the army that Wen Xu brought was eliminated faster than the way they approached Cloud Recesses.

Concealed weapons are forbidden was one of the rules that have been removed. Nowadays, aside from their sword and instrument for musical cultivation, every Gusu-Lan disciple brings a dagger concealed within their robes in case an emergency arises and they would need it. Liu Meiyue won her debate fair and square against the elders for this.

This also helped setting traps around Cloud Recesses without feeling guilty about breaking the said rule.

Qinghengjun came out when Wen Xu landed at the entrance arc of the Cloud Recesses. Wen Xu may have been raised as the next Wen Rouhan but Lan Qijun grew up in the same generation as Wen Rouhan.

Wen Xu is way too inexperienced to fight against him.

Qinghengjun, Lan-zongzhu of Gusu-Lan Sect has beheaded Wen Xu, Wen Rouhan's heir. The rest of the army sent to Gusu has fallen.

Liu Meiyue welcomed her husband in her embrace, not minding the bloodied sword on his hand.

“You did great.”

“Oh to receive a compliment from my dear wife.”

He received a slap on his chest while the three tried not to laugh. Only Lan Qiren huffed at the display. His brother has truly removed rules about public display of affection for himself.

Despite how fast the news traveled and how Gusu-Lan sent Wen Xu's head and sword to Qishan, they still sent letters to the other sects as a warning of the brazen attack of Qishan-Wen. They received a warning from Wen Qionglin, it is only right to warn the rest too.

Then the news of indoctrination came. A messenger arrived in Gusu-Lan to send the invitation that Wen Xu was supposed to bring. No one believed that it was his only purpose. After all, he brought an army for an invitation. Now, people were even speculating the reason why Wen Rouhan sent his niece and nephew for lectures.

Gusu-Lan did not give any response to those speculations.

Instead, they did not send their disciples. They required the heir, the head disciple, and 18 or 19 more disciples depending if the heir is the head disciple as well. Each sect must send 20 disciples in total for the *indoctrination*.

"Is Gusu-Lan raising a war against Qishan-Wen?"

"Well, Qishan-Wen made an attack first!"

"And now Gusu-Lan is going against the Chief Cultivator's words after they killed his heir!"

"I am surprised that Gusu-Lan is still standing right now. I heard the wrath of Wen Rouhan when the two Wen cultivators arrived with his son's head and sword."

"Well-well, is it time for us to evacuate in case a war happens?"

"I have asked my family to move to our province already. I will follow after I settle some business."

"But who do you think will win?"

"The powerful."

"And that is?"

In front of the Gusu-Lan Elders, Lan Qijun stood with his head high.

"I would rather start a war than send by sons and my disciples to Qishan."

"Very well, we should prepare."

To their surprise, Nie Mingjue went to represent Qinghe-Nie. Lan Xichen's knees almost buckled when he received the communication talisman.

This is a strategy.

The message said.

He sent regular messages, both to his father who was enhancing Unclean Realm's defense, and to his betrothed who was still on a lockdown.

We are here as Wen Chao's toys. He uses Wen Zhuliu against us. I will be poking my eyes if I see Wen Chao and his mistress for another day.

Have you heard of the Quintessence of the Wen Sect? Wen Chao does not know them and yet he asked all of us to memorize them. I did not bother opening the copy they provided.

Our tools were confiscated. We were sent to night hunt without them. I am close to killing Wen Chao and his Jiaojiao – whatever her name is!

The brat was only seen at the beginning of our hunt. He was called to Nightless City and Wen-guniang overtook his place. It feels like a calm before the storm.

And just like that, the indoctrination ended.

I am on my way back to Qinghe. The hunt ended with Wen-guniang's announcement and we were advised to return to our sects "as soon as possible." I believe that it was advice from her and not from Qishan-Wen.

There were rumors that Wen Rouhan was looking for something but he cannot find them. They said that he sent his second son, Wen Chao to look for them while Wen Xu was preparing their army.

After Wen Xu's death, he assigned Wen Chao for indoctrination while he left Nightless City to personally look for the things he wanted to find.

“Wen Rouhan killed the divine Xuanwu of Slaughter in Dusk Creek Mountain!”

“All hail to the Xiandu!”

“They said he absorbed its power and has become more powerful, an immortal!”

“Everyone who went against him must be shaking in fear! Wen Rouhan will be out to kill soon!”

Then the attack on the Unclean Realm happened with the claims of punishing Nie Mingjue for undermining Wen Chao (and even Wen Qing as Wen Chao claimed), especially during the night hunts.

It was said that Nie Mingjue was leading everyone instead of following Wen Chao’s orders (and one of those is to use humans as bait. It was good that he was called to the Nightless City before he could truly do it or Nie Mingjue could have killed him on the spot without caring about Wen Zhuliu and his core-melting hand).

Yet Wen Chao did not stand a chance. Wen Zhuliu was just fast enough to save his young master that was a hair's breadth away from being on the endpoint of Nie Yongwu’s saber.

Life continued in a strict and alert manner in Cloud Recesses. Everyone was advised to *never* put their guards down.

While Wei Wuxian was busy assisting nainai inside the nursery because the kids will continue to play no matter what was happening outside Cloud Recesses, another news came.

“Oh.”

Was the only thing that came out of his lips.

Lotus Pier was attacked. As the other sects were prepared, Qishan-Wen came even more prepared. Yet the Wens came with claims that Yunmeng-Jiang’s conduct during the indoctrination was *good* because out of everyone, Jiang Wanyin and the rest of the disciples were *listening* to Wen Chao’s instructions.

Of course, Jiang Wanyin did, he was thoroughly instructed by Yu Ziyuan to not cause any troubles in Qishan as he did in Gusu.

Even before the real purpose of Wang Lingjiao and Wen Chao was said, Yu Ziyuan has already lost her temper.

“I heard that Yu-furen did not lose Zidian but it simply does not work anymore. I heard you lost a duel. How true is this, huh? Yu-furen?”

“A-niang?”

“San-niang?”

“What kind of nonsense are you talking about?!”

Jiang Fengmian is dead. Yu Ziyuan's core was melted. Jiang Wanyin is alive but had his core partially damaged. He was saved by his father on his last few breaths and that protected at least half of his core before Wen Zhuliu could fully melt it. Yu Ziyuan and Jiang Wanyin were able to ride a boat to Lanling.

More than half of Lotus Pier was burnt.

Wang Lingjiao and Wen Chao came to actually announce that because of Jiang Wanyin's *outstanding* conduct, Lotus Pier is given a *reward* from the Wen Sect and that is to make it a *supervisory office* of the Wen Sect in Yunmeng.

Yu Ziyuan's temper made it easy for Wang Lingjiao and Wen Chao.

Jiang Yanli was separated from them but she was able to run away to Meishan with Jinzhu who brought her out of Lotus Pier as instructed by Jiang Fengmian.

Yet Meishan was attacked too. Jiang Yanli came out alive but was severely injured during the attack.

More sects were attacked but sects within Gusu and Qinghe territory were protected by the main sect. Lanling-Jin remained *neutral* up to the last minute.

A war council was called in Qinghe.

But before they could even come up on how to call the war that was brewing, another news came that shocked everyone.

Wen Chao is dead. Wang Lingjiao hanged herself. Wen Zhuliu is dead. Everything happened inside the compound of Lotus Pier where they were residing and no one witnessed how it happened.

Wen Rouhan died of demonic cultivation backlash and a fatal qi deviation.

Wen Yu became the acting Sect Leader and will be taken over by Wen Qing when ‘she is ready.’ The spiritual tools were returned to the respective sects.

“Did you know that Wen-furen – the current Wen-zongzhu was imprisoned by Wen Rouhan? It was said Wen Rouhan did not just die of demonic cultivation and qi deviation but it was because she stabbed him with his sword!”

“Of course, they won’t announce it that way! People will think that Wen-furen coveted the position if people learned that she killed Wen Rouhan!”

“Anyone would want to kill Wen Rouhan, come on.”

“The important thing is, Wen Sect has a new leader and let us see how it will go.”

“Hah! As long as my crops prosper, I do not care who leads where.”

“Same here!”

Wen Qing may have not taken the position yet but she has already announced Wen Qionglin as her heir.

Wei Wuxian leaned his head on Lan Wangji’s shoulder while his hands were busy petting and scratching Zhan-tuzi.

“Aiyah! Lan Zhan! Imagine if a war happened? How will I come back to Gusu with you?”

“Wei Ying?” Lan Wangji’s brows furrowed as he looked at his betrothed. The announcement of their betrothal was delayed because of everything that happened but they are extremely fine with it.

“Imagine this Lan Zhan – we will need to fight, live in camps without proper baths. Imagine all the grime and dirt especially on your hair, er-gege? No-no! That cannot be! You always ask me to come back to Gusu once we encounter all these dirty night hunts that cause us to dirty ourselves and you deem baths in the inn not enough to clean you up!” Wei Wuxian

dramatically flailed his arms and moved a lot which made Zhan-tuzi move from his lap and snuggle on Lan Wangji's lap where Ying-tuzi was nestled comfortably.

"I'd very much love to sleep in my room, thank you very much and I know you too, er-gege! Especially with how you need to use your hair oil every night--"

"Wei Ying!"

"So how can we come back to Gusu if there was a war? No, we can't and I don't want that! A lot of lives have already been taken by what the Wen Sect under Wen Rouhan tried to do. I do not think I'd want to see the war happening. It was good that it ended before it even started."

Lan Wangji did not know what to say. Wei Wuxian just spoke his heart, his opinion out loud, and at the same time, teasing him with things that he cannot really retort back.

He truly uses hair oils for his hair and he internally gets annoyed when he fails to do it for days when they're on night hunts. He never vocally says it but of course, *his* Wei Ying would always know. He would ask him to come back to Gusu right after the hunt and Wei Wuxian would playfully tug his hair on their journey back.

"Aiyoo! Your hair still looks pretty, Lan Zhan!"

Lan Wangji would probably admit that the only thing he is vain about is his hair. It started with how his a-niang would always comb and fix it when they visit her once a month. Then as his hair grew longer and saw how his brother took good care of his strands, Lan Wangji tried to copy it and realized that he likes it.

He did not realize that *his* Wei Ying would use it to tease him.

Lan Wangji blinked to remove his thoughts from his hair as he raised his other hand to fix Wei Wuxian's hair.

"Wei Ying."

"Mn."

"I am glad that the war did not happen too."

"I know. I could tell."

"And I am glad that you are safe."

"Aiyaah Lan Zhan, I am glad that you are safe too... that our family is safe!" Wei Wuxian nuzzled his nose on his cheek and suddenly pecked on his lips. Lan Wangji sat there, frozen.

Wei Wuxian then glanced at their long-suffering chaperone and winked at him. Is there even a point in having their chaperone around?

Ah, right... for Lan Qiren's peace of mind.

After one random dinner, many nights after the fear of a war happening began, Liu Meiyue laughed at her husband after what he said.

The chief cultivator position was available and the great Qinghengjun declined the position.

“At least tell me you told Nie-zongzhu to accept it? Unless we want Jin Guangshan to take the lead?”

Lan Qijun laughed, Lan Qiren huffed, and the three listened to them with interest.

But the next thing they knew, Jin Guangshan was found dead in a brothel in Yunping City, poisoned.

It has been extremely tiring for everyone. From the announcement of Lan Xichen and Nie Mingjue's betrothal, the oppression to the minor sects, to Wen's attack on Cloud Recesses and the succeeding attacks to the other sects, death of the main Wen family and succession of Wen Yu as the Sect Leader, and then Jin Guangshan's death.

The announcement of Jin Guangshan's death was a total surprise to everyone. According to the investigation, Meng Yao, Nie Mingjue's ex-deputy was the one who killed him when he came to the brothel in Yunping.

Meng Yao was sent to Lanling after he finally told Nie Mingyu that he was ready to introduce himself to his father. Nie Mingyu talked to Madam Jin- Li Shiyu before she sent him off.

“I am thankful for what you have done to us, Meng Yao. It is time for you to show your father how great you are. You will be a good asset to Lanling-Jin. Come and visit us sometimes, okay?”

Yet he was pushed away by Jin Guangshan and he asked Meng Yao to never return. Jin Guangshan kicked him on the long stairs of Koi Tower and threw away the pearl button he brought that Jin Guangshan gave his mother after the night of lust they shared.

Jin cultivators saw it and laughed at him. As he left the Koi Tower, he heard stories about how *another bastard* of Jin Guangshan showed up and was kicked out of Koi Tower.

There was a group of Jin cultivators looking for him under Madam Jin's instructions but he hid from them. He knew it was because of Madam Nie that Madam Jin was looking *after him* but he heard stories. Madam Jin does not accept *Jin Guangshan's bastards*. Meng Yao does not wish to face her.

Due to humiliation and embarrassment, Meng Yao did not return to Qinghe and instead, he hid in Yunping, in the brothel where his mother used to work.

Then Jin Guangshan came and was too drunk to recognize him to the point that he asked for Meng Yao to come to his room after he saw him downstairs.

Seeing red, Meng Yao killed Jin Guangshan by putting poison on his drink. It was a fatal one that only gave Jin Guangshan last three breaths before he died.

There was a witness and before anyone could stop him, Meng Yao drank the poison from the same cup.

"He said that he does not regret what he did. He would not know how to face Meng Shi, his mother after killing his father but he does not regret it. Those were his last words."

Sisi, the witness, and Meng Shi's friend, said.

Nie Mingyu grieved for what happened to her ward. She regretted sending him to Lanling despite it being Meng Yao's decision. He was still given a proper burial... even if Nie Mingyu found out that the poison in Meng Yao's possession came from Unclean Realm's apothecary. It was usually given for euthanasia or when it is decided for the patient to die instead of suffering more pain. No one knew how Meng Yao got a vial of it as it is one of the most concealed vials in the apothecary. Nie Yongwu had their apothecary double warded to make sure it does not happen again.

For Lanling-Jin Sect, Li Shiyu became her son's regent until Jin Zixuan was ready to take over the sect leadership.

Due to circumstances, the reinstatement of Jin Zixuan and Jiang Yanli's betrothal never happened.

During the time that Yu Ziyuan and Jiang Wanyin came to Lanling for refuge and Li Shiyu still helped them *despite everything*. Jiang Wanyin lashed out his frustration and temper when he finally regained his consciousness. Yu Ziyuan did not hold back her temper after hearing gossip about the downfall of Yunmeng-Jiang around them and Jiang Wanyin was not doing any better. Instead of laying low and recovering, he insulted Jin Zixuan right in front of Li Shiyu who saw red.

"I extended my help to you because of what happened to your sect but I would never tolerate insults especially to my son and you even did it in front of me, Jiang Cheng. You are to be a Sect Leader now. Act like one!"

She turned to Yu Ziyuan.

“Yu Ziyuan, I helped you in honor of our sworn sisterhood but I’ve had enough! I understand that you are both grieving for what happened but do not instill your frustration on my people! You are too much! I helped you both and this is what you give back to me? Insult my people and my son?!”

“Leave. I would not honor our sisterhood anymore. Meishan-Yu would understand.

“Leave. A carriage will be prepared to bring the two of you to Yunmeng so you could return to Lotus Pier.”

Li Shiyu met Yu Ziyuan’s eyes. The sworn sister that she thought she knew.

“This is the extent of my mercy. Leave.”

Instead, Li Shiyu suggested Qin Su from Laoling-Qin only for the Madam of the Qin Sect to thoroughly refuse, announcing that her daughter was Jin Guangshan's child as well.

If Li Shiyu could raise Jin Guangshan from the dead only to kill him once more is possible, Li Shiyu could have done it.

Though the future is not bleak for Jin Zixuan as he has been visiting Unclean Realm in the guise of sect business but truthfully, he has been meeting and was being a blushing mess in front of Nie Ningning, Nie Yongwu's niece. After everything that happened, Li Shiyu decided that she would put her son's choices and feelings first.

She was ready to begin betrothal negotiations once Jin Zixuan told her his intention. Besides, an alliance with the Nie Sect will be ideal.

The cultivation world has been trying to recover from everything that happened. It was a slow process but every sect is trying their best, some with its new leaders, while the others prosper with their current ones.

A year and a half after what happened to the Qishan-Wen Sect that is still trying to recover from what happened as well as apply a lot of changes to how the Sect was being run under Wen Yu’s leadership, some wonderful news was heard.

Qinghe-Nie and Gusu-Lan finally agreed to push through with the wedding.

“They have waited enough. The more that this gets delayed, we will have Qiren chaperone those two.”

Nie Yongwu’s words were received with so much laughter yet they proceeded with the wedding.

The wedding happened in Unclean Realm. Both mothers were excitedly supervising everything with Nie Huaisang and Wei Wuxian’s help.

Instead of making it a huge event as they initially planned, with respect for the sects that are still rebuilding, they limited the guests and festivities.

What matters is for Nie Mingjue and Lan Xichen to *finally* do their bows.

With Nie Yongwu and Nie Mingyu (who was holding the memorial plaque of Nie Mingjue’s mother), Lan Qijun and Liu Meiyue in front of them, Nie Mingjue and Lan Xichen bowed to the heaven and earth, bowed to their parents, and bowed to each other with a promise of a lifetime of companionship, love, and devotion.

Both mothers cried as they received the tea.

Nie Huaisang was bawling his heart out beside Wen Qionglin while Wei Wuxian kept on tugging Lan Wangji’s sleeves as he could see his eyes glistening with unshed tears.

“I’m so happy for them.”

“Mn. Me too... xiongzhang and da-ge... deserve this.”

“Finally, right?”

“Mn.”

“We’re next?”

Wei Wuxian snickered as he saw how Lan Wangji’s ears instantly turned pink.

“Mn.”

And they reached out to hold each other’s hands while they watched their elder brothers shine brightly in their red wedding robes, looking like the happiest couple because they truly are.

A few weeks later with Nie Mingjue and Lan Xichen still enjoying the bliss of married life in Qinghe, the preparation for the announcement of Lan Wangji and Wei Wuxian’s betrothal began.

Lan Qiren cleared his throat as he fixed his already perfect sitting position. Being in Lotus Pier after what happened two years ago feels... devastating to say the least. The sect has finished its mourning period with Jiang Fengmian's passing and Jiang Wanyin has taken over the mantle of sect leadership with his mother as his chief adviser.

Lan Qiren cannot feel the usual warmth of what one will imagine when they hear the Lotus Pier – a warm place with beautiful scenery. Now, it only feels... heavy, dark, it became a place that Lan Qiren does not want to continue describing.

Lan Qiren acknowledges Jiang Fengmian as a capable Sect Leader. He was a good sect heir back then. He had a bright future ahead of him. He does not want to put blame but part of him wanted to know what happened to the sect heir he once knew.

For years, he noticed how Jiang Fengmian went from being an outstanding and intelligent cultivator, good in politics, and a good leader to someone who would look like a faded shadow when he stands beside his wife.

Yu Ziyuan is a force to reckon with and Lan Qiren has high respect for women, Liu Meiyue is his sister-in-law after all. But Yu Ziyuan... Yu Ziyuan is a woman whom Lan Qiren cannot truly stand – in the past, in the present, and perhaps, even in the future.

He looked around Lotus Pier before he was led to this pavilion to wait. He knows that this place used to be lively, full of life, full of laughter, and happiness. There would be boats on the lake, there would be disciples picking lotus pods, and there would be disciples running around the training grounds, doing drills. One could see kites flying when you stand from the gates of Lotus Pier.

Yet now, it looks bare. Some carpenters work hard for the rebuilding, there are servants, there are disciples who could have survived the attack or are new recruits.

He knows that this is still an effect of the attack.

Lan Qiren just couldn't stop thinking about how the sect could have used *whatever they knew* to their advantage. He heard stories, he heard how life in Lotus Pier continued instead of them preparing for a possible attack. He heard how the Wens surrounded Lotus Pier that brought fear to the people of Yunmeng. He heard how the attack happened so fast that it was obvious that Lotus Pier did not stand a chance.

Some were even saying that... Yu Ziyuan could have saved Lotus Pier if only Zidian was still with her.

Lan Qiren tried his best not to scoff, it was improper for someone in his status after all.

Truly, no one knows what happened to Zidian, and part of Lan Qiren thinks that he wouldn't want to know it anymore.

He came to bring the books that Gusu-Lan contributed to the rebuilding of Lotus Pier's library. As one of the sects that were greatly affected by Wen Rouhan's actions, Yunmeng-Jiang received a lot of support from the other sects to show *humanity*. Wen Yu provided a huge amount to pay for what Qishan-Wen has caused Yunmeng-Jiang. They are using it for rebuilding as they obviously cannot reject any help at the moment.

Gusu-Lan, being a sect that values learning, has pledged to provide books to Lotus Pier's library that was one of the pavilions burned during Wen Chao's attack.

"My son has already met you, why did you have to request my presence?"

Lan Qiren stood up to give her a proper bow, not wanting to level with her rudeness.

"Yu-furen."

"And now you call me that?"

"I must admit, I did not just come here for the books."

"I know you, Lan Qiren. Such responsibility could be done by your disciples."

"Qinghengjun still keeps his words, our disciples are not to step foot in Yunmeng so I came."

Yu Ziyuan gritted her teeth.

Lan Qiren looked at her. She still carries herself with so much pride. The biggest difference must be the presence of white from her usual violet and indigo robes. Lan Qiren thinks that she must still be *mourning*.

"I do not want to waste my time on useless talks, Lan Qiren. Why are you here?" Yi Ziyuan put her hand on the table as she met his eyes.

Lan Qiren took a deep breath as he fixed his posture once more.

"Why did you bring Wei Ying to Gusu?"

Lan Qiren saw how Yu Ziyuan's finger twitched on top of the table, how she clenched it into a fist, and how she hid it under the table. She gritted her teeth as she narrowed her eyes on him.

Lan Qiren met her eyes.

"It was not just you, Yu Ziyuan."

Chapter End Notes



Be safe and have a nice day💖

Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

Hello!

Apologies for the delay in the update 🙄

(If you read my other ongoing fic, I also said the same thing there hehe) Long story short and very TMI, 4 out of 7 members of our household tested positive with the virus. I also got myself tested, thankfully, despite how close contact that happened, I tested negative (and I pray it stays that way) 🙏 As they are in home quarantine with mild symptoms, I, together with the two who tested negative had to serve them and make sure that everything is well until they recover... and it is not yet over and we still need to provide our service to them lol but I *finally* found the time to update and so here it is~

That was such a TMI but I just wanted to share the recent happenings in my life because I swear, I really planned for this to be completed before September ends but I guess... there will some delays lol

I also want to say that scrolling through your comments boosted me up and made me smile despite how tiring each day is hehe... because yes, it was not just Yu Ziyuan 😊😄

Thank you for reading, commenting, and leaving kudos to this fic, it means a lot to me
💖

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

"It was not just you, Yu Ziyuan." Lan Qiren repeated as Yu Ziyuan's face started to turn pale.

"What--"

"But I would like to thank you, Yu Ziyuan."

"Lan Qiren! What are you talking about?!"

"Thank you for saving him from having to deal with you and your husband's bias. May Jiang Fengmian rest in peace."

Lan Qiren clenched his jaw with his choice of words but he continued to speak.

"Thank you because he does not need to deal with your son's ego and pride and protect your daughter's reputation, your entire family, and your sect. Thank you for *saving* him from years of suffering and tears. Thank you for *saving* him the moment he was kicked out of the inn, he

did not have to fight against the dogs just for him to eat. Thank you for giving me someone I could treat and raise as my son. I hope I could make Wei Changze and Cangse Sanren happy for what their son has become.”

“Lan Qiren!”

“I do not know why you did it but thank you.”

“You!”

Lan Qiren’s eyes narrowed as he recalled little Wei Ying’s state when he found him in Caiyi town: extremely sick, pale, and almost lifeless.

He does not know what Yu Ziyuan’s reasons were but – but if he deduced it right then he knows that Yu Ziyuan must have not known what happened right after her death for her to get rid of Wei Wuxian.

Lan Qiren gritted his teeth.

“Do you know what happened after your death, Yu Ziyuan?”

“Lan Qiren!”

“There was a war. It was won because of Wei Wuxian. Your son became the sect leader and he wielded Zidian. Your daughter married the Jin Sect Heir. You have a grandson named Jin Ling, courtesy name Rulan. Your son brought your sect up from the ashes. Do you know what else happened?”

“Lan-“

“You warned Wei Wuxian to protect your son with his life, and Jiang Fengmian did the same. Despite the hatred, the blame, the slap that gave him, despite the whips you did on his back, he still did it.” Lan Qiren huffed.

“Do you want to know how? Your son lost his core and Wei Wuxian gave him his.”

He could see how Yu Ziyuan turned paler but Lan Qiren does not know where his self-control went. He continued speaking.

“I don’t know if your son was ever thankful as the gap between them just grew bigger after some circumstances that happened. Wei Wuxian died and was brought back to life by a body sacrifice. When he returned, he tried to reconcile with your son but he never gave him a chance to do so. Wei Wuxian lived a happy life with my nephew and their son and he’ll probably live a much better and happier life now... without fighting a war, without losing his core, and without having to grow up under someone like you.”

With Yu Ziyuan’s current state, Lan Qiren knows that he won’t be hearing any response from her. He stood up.

“You gave him a favor when you brought him to Gusu.”

He gave her a bow.

"Live well, Yu Ziyuan."

Lying is forbidden but he'd rather spare some details. Yu Ziyuan deserves to know things that she missed to see.

With a wave of his hand, he removed the silencing dome that he made the moment he entered the pavilion. No one should hear the conversation they had.

He looked to his right and saw a shadow that immediately hid. He shook his head. He is a Sect Leader now but it seems like the child still needs to learn a lot of things... and not eavesdropping is one of them. He cannot help but wonder how he'll turn out as a Sect Leader *now* that he still has his mother with him.

He shook his head.

Lan Qiren made his way out of Lotus Pier without anyone escorting him.

He did not look back.

If there is one thing that he could be proud of aside from what he has done in raising Wei Wuxian, it would have to be how he saved his sister-in-law, Liu Meiyue, and eventually saved his brother from dying of a broken heart while in seclusion. He gave his nephews their parents, and he gave Gusu-Lan their leader.

This does not mean that Lan Qiren underestimated himself with what he has done *before*. He became the parent figure in Xichen and Wangji's life after the demise of his sister-in-law and six years later, his brother who never truly became a father to his sons. He was not born as a leader and was not truly raised to be one. He was asked to join his brother's sect leader training and lessons, he did not know that he would have to use all those learnings as an acting sect leader after his brother's seclusion.

Those things did not happen *this time* though.

Because now, Lan Qijun and Liu Meiyue are there, Lan Qiren was given a chance to live his life. He took good care of the child he claimed as his ward. He taught disciples to his heart's content. He got to do things that he never did *before*. He got to live a life that was *lighter* yet full of love and life. He had a brother to go to when he needed assistance, and of course, he had a sister-in-law who willingly offered him help as well.

Lan Qiren... Lan Qiren is thankful for that.

His sister-in-law was slowly poisoned four years after the birth of Lan Zhan. They asked for a spare heir after Lan Huan's birth and so his brother was made to meet Liu Meiyue once more. Then that the elders did not see any reasons to keep a Madam of the Sect, especially after killing his brother's teacher, they chose to bring matters into their own hands.

The one who was bringing the poison was the servant assigned to bring Liu Meiyue's food. She was an illegitimate child of Lan Jianhong, the teacher that Liu Meiyue killed.

Lan Qiren brought Healer Lan Ji to the Gentian House to check on his sister-in-law. The poison has already traveled to her core but it was a poison that wouldn't be found if you do not know that it exists in her body. She still looks normal despite slowly being poisoned for a year. Qiren actually wondered how strong his sister-in-law is to last that long. He thought he almost failed in saving her but Healer Lan Ji called for nainai.

"Nainai will know what to do."

When Elder Nainai found out, she just narrowed her eyes, furrily passing her expression, and then she masked it with her usual calm expression. She nodded.

"I know what to do. Ji-er, prepare these things for me. A-Ren, help her and tell A-Jun that if he still wants to keep his wife alive, allow me to enter the Hanshi and talk to him."

Nainai is a dear member of the sect. No one truly knows how long she has been alive. There are a lot of elders who have been living for centuries, most of them have resigned themselves to seclusion and would just ring a bell when they have reached the point of their lives where they chose to leave the world of the living. A ritual will be done for them to have a peaceful passing.

Nainai on the other hand was *rumored* to be older than the current oldest elder in seclusion but since Gossip is forbidden in the sect, no one openly talks about it. Nainai has cared for and nurtured sect leaders and members of the main family. She has been there for Qijun and Qiren since they were babies like how she is currently there for Lan Huan and Lan Zhan.

And so when nainai said she knew what to do, Qiren put his entire trust in her.

While Liu Meiyue was being treated, Lan Qiren talked to his brother. It was a long and hideous talk but it bore fruit.

Lan Qijun secretly left seclusion. They worked hard to remove the elders from their position by investigating and Qiren would present it to the Council of Elders. Most of them were forced into seclusion while the others – especially those who plotted for the death of the current Madam of the Lan Sect were given capital punishment under Gusu Law. Killing is forbidden in Cloud Recesses, but there is a Gusu Law and in Gusu Law, capital punishment is allowed. They were punished outside Cloud Recesses. His brother was relentless after hearing the things he told him. Lan Qijun functioned like a true Sect Leader.

He is truly thankful to have his brother back.

Then he talked to Liu Meiyue who survived and was as good as new after nainai cured her with the help of Lan Qijun and Healer Lan Ji. It was another long talk once more. Liu Meiyue readily agreed after learning the things he told her.

“Tell the Council of Elders I am ready to talk.”

She killed Qinghengjun’s teacher *by accident* but still, she does not regret or repent what she did.

“There was no point in proving my innocence because it did not happen yet but what I did was self-defense.”

Lan Qiren used *it* once more and saw through what Liu Meiyue was talking about.

Lan Jianhong, his brother’s teacher, did not approve of his brother’s choice of a woman to marry. Lans does not look through their partner’s background. It is always about their feelings – their love. Lan Jianhong thought that he was able to build the esteemed Qinghengjun into a promising cultivator and would marry someone his equal and not just a random rogue cultivator he met on a night hunt.

Liu Meiyue was in an inn when she realized she was being followed. There were three rogue cultivators and a Lan cultivator. She heard their plan and she acted before they could.

“Why did you not confess?”

“What could my word do against an esteemed teacher of this sect when you have persecuted me even before I could say anything?”

The three rogue cultivators were able to run away and Liu Meiyue does not recognize them. Only Lan Jianhong's body was found and he was able to send a Gusu-Lan signal flare in the middle of the fight. He was dead when Gusu-Lan disciples arrived with Liu Meiyue's sword pierced through his chest.

At that time, the sect conducted Inquiry to Lan Jianhong and though he could not lie, the questions asked did not probe, to tell the truth.

What is your name?

Lan Jianhong.

Who killed you?

The woman in front of you. Liu Meiyue.

Do you know her?

She is Qinghengjun's intended.

Do you know her personally?

No.

Do you know why she attacked you?

No.

The wedding with Qinghengjun followed.

Lan Qijun stood his ground. He chose Liu Meiyue as his wife and any remaining elders who oppose this should speak up now. No one did but Liu Meiyue ended up in the Gentian House while Lan Qijun entered seclusion. Lan Qiren could imagine Lan Jianhong's reaction over the initial turnout of events.

The first time Lan Qiren saw Liu Meiyue wearing the Gusu-Lan spousal robes, the fitting robes for the Madam of the Lan Sect with the main clan ribbon on her forehead while his brother was once again wearing his Sect Leader robes and headpiece while holding his sword, Lan Qiren knew things would greatly change, not just for him but for his nephews and for little A-Ying. It was a significant change.

As Lan Qiren arrived in Cloud Recesses, he took a deep breath as he headed to the Discipline Hall.

He has done everything he needed to do. *It is time.*

The head of the discipline committee was surprised when Lan Qiren knelt in front of the door.

“Call Qinghengjun, tell him that Lan-laoshi has arrived.”

Lan Qiren knelt with his back straight. He did not hear his brother's arrival but he was surprised to see his sister-in-law there as well.

“A-Ren,” Lan Qijun called.

Lan Qiren met his eyes.

“Qinghengjun, this disciple has broken the valued rules of Gusu-Lan. I kneel before you to accept my punishment.”

“A-Ren.”

Liu Meiyue is obviously gripping her hands as she clasped them together in front of her.

Lan Qiren met his brother’s eyes. Seldom can one see the esteemed Qinghengjun looking distraught and conflicted. Meeting his younger’s brother’s eyes made him take a deep breath and slowly... he nodded.

“Bring out the discipline ruler.”

The head of the discipline committee froze.

“Qinghengjun.”

“Lan Qiren has broken rules for years and he has personally confessed them to me. Disciple Lan Qiren is submitting to his punishment now. He will receive 300 strikes from the discipline ruler.”

Lan Qiren did not break eye contact with his brother. He was determined to do this. He could see how worried his sister-in-law is but he knows that *they will understand*.

The rest of the committee members came out and the head of the discipline committee was the last one to exit their pavilion with the discipline ruler in his hands.

Lan Qiren stripped his garments down to his inner robe.

If the disciple has personally confessed their mistakes to the Sect Leader, the Sect Leader is given a choice to forward the case to the Discipline Committee or provide the punishment he deems fit.

Since then, Lan Qijun has been forwarding cases to the Discipline Committee, this is the first time that he was giving the punishment himself. To everyone’s surprise, it is the fifth degree or the greatest punishment of Gusu-Lan Sect could give to their disciple.

The first degree would be copy lines of the rules. This is usually given to the novices, those disciples younger than 12 years old.

The second degree would be copying the entire book of rules. The guest disciples do it in the library while the Gusu-Lan disciples do it in a handstand position.

The third degree would be discipline paddle. This is usually given to repeaters, great offenders that do not belong to the sect, and to those who have done something that *could have* harmed themselves or their fellow disciples.

The fourth degree would be discipline sticks. The number of discipline sticks depends on the weight of the rules broken. The stick must be stroked with the same amount of spiritual energy until it breaks before the next stick could be used. This is usually given to rule

offenders that have caused harm to themselves, to their fellow disciples, or to Gusu-Lan Sect as a whole. This also applies to disrespecting Gusu-Lan's principles and teachings.

The fifth degree would be the discipline ruler. For other sects, the greatest (corporal) punishment they could give is the discipline whip while for Gusu-Lan, it is their famed discipline ruler. Once directed properly, several strikes could give the same effect and pain as the discipline whip. This is usually given to the greatest offenders of Gusu-Lan's path to righteousness.

For Qinghengjun to give the fifth degree of punishment to his brother, anyone would be curious as to what sin Lan Qiren confessed that would require such punishment.

"It must be done," Lan Qiren said as he squared his shoulders, feeling the coldness of the air seep through the thin fabric of his inner robe.

He kept his posture straight.

Lan Qijun took a deep breath as he closed his eyes.

"Begin."

Lan Qiren closed his eyes at the first contact of the discipline ruler on his back.

His thoughts brought him back... years ago... on the day he found the sick child in Caiyi Town.

*

Lan Qiren went to Caiyi Town to visit the market and buy some candies he would be passing to Liu Meiyue as it is her only request from him.

"You cannot give my children candies when children their age enjoy such luxury. Buy me a pack and I'll be the one to give it to them."

But as Lan Qiren passed by an alley, he noticed people flocking and panicking.

"Is he dead?!"

“No! He’s breathing.”

“Then do something!”

“What do you expect me to do?! What if he dies when I hold him?!”

“He’s a child and he needs a healer! Do something!”

Lan Qiren’s brows furrowed as he approached them. They immediately parted when they saw him. They recognized him as a Gusu-Lan cultivator while some also knew his name.

“Gongzi! Gongzi! We need help! There is a child in that cart! I was supposed to bring the cart to have it fixed-“

“You were going to steal it!”

“Either way! I came here and found the child!”

Lan Qiren approached the said cart and found a child wearing dark blue robes, pale, had shallow breathing, and almost lifeless. He immediately checked his wrist and he was surprised by his strong qi even if Qiren could tell that he is barely five years old. His mind started to work, trying to think if there were any disciples of Gusu-Lan that had a child living in Caiyi but before he could go deeper into that, the child began to shiver. He immediately took out a cloak from his sleeves and wrapped it around the child. He made a decision out of whim.

“I am bringing the child to Cloud Recesses for healing. Send in a message if someone comes looking for this child.”

He flew faster despite knowing that the child was suffering from the cold. He made sure to wrap the cloak tighter and warmed him with his own qi.

He breached the wards and landed in the medical pavilion. He called for Healer Lan Ji – Healer Ji to check on the child.

They almost lost him that night.

And the following night.

And the next.

And the next.

And the next.

And Lan Qiren did not want to give up. He does not know why but the child gave a tug to his heart that he does not leave his side in the medical pavilion unless needed. The healers do not give up as well. Healer Lan Ji is his cousin and the greatest apprentice of their current head healer. He trusted her skills.

It took three weeks, four days, and 21 hours until the little boy finally opened his eyes because Lan Qiren was counting and he was fortunately there.

“How do you feel?”

“May I know your name?”

“Is there anything that hurts?”

But the child just stared at him and he started crying. The healers checked on him but he did not let go of Lan Qiren’s hand, he seemed afraid of the newcomers. He fell asleep in Lan Qiren’s embrace.

The next time he woke up, the child still did not respond to his questions. He explained to him that the healers were there to cure him and so the child finally allowed them to touch him.

“He has not lost his voice, that, I could confirm... but it will take time A-Ren. He is still very weak and the new environment is obviously scaring him. As someone whom he first saw the moment he opened his eyes, he must have trusted you immediately. Be there for him in these trying times. We’ll do our best to cure him.”

Day after day, Lan Qiren would visit the sick child and talk to him as if he was talking to his nephews. He has asked Nainai to look after his nephews first. Nainai took one glance at the sick child and then she nodded. Lan Qiren does not know what that glance meant but he was thankful for Nainai's help.

Then finally, one day, he asked for his name again and the little kid shook his head.

“You do not know your name?”

When the child shook his head again, he raised it to the healers. That is when they said that the fever could have taken his memory.

Lan Qiren did not know what to do.

He asked for Nainai's help because she is the closest he could go to who would not judge him for getting so worked up with a child he picked up from the street and would give him practical advice and perhaps, answers to his questions.

He truly wanted to help the child as he remembered someone when he saw him. The child always has a blank expression on his face and he feels like that does not fit him. He felt like the child should be smiling, should be happy... should be healed.

“There is a technique. Not forbidden but not practiced as well.”

“What is it nainai?”

“Are you willing to do it, A-Ren?”

“Will it be dangerous for the child?”

“No. He will be asleep... but for you...”

“Is it something that I could not survive from?”

“You will live... but are you ready?”

“Nainai?”

“Ready to see what you could see when you enter the child's mind?”

“Nainai?”

“Ready to accept and perhaps... take action when you see it?”

“Nainai, please be clear with your words. Qiren does not understand.”

“There is this thing we call empathy.”

“Empathy?”

“It is entering one’s mind where you will see their memories, their experiences... basically, their life. Normally done to the dead but could dangerously be done to the living if extremely needed.”

“Nainai.”

“In Gusu-Lan, we have the Song of Recollection. I could play that song for the both of you to sleep. You will be connected to him by that song and you will see his life from the beginning of his birth until now. You will wake when you reach the current moment.”

“Is he going to remember them?”

“No. Only you will see them.”

“Am I not breaching his privacy?”

“Do you want to do it or not, A-Ren?”

The only one who knows that they will do the technique is Lan Ji. Nainai placed a silencing dome around the three of them while Lan Ji waited at the side.

Lan Qiren laid down on the bed beside the child. He was asleep and Lan Qiren also closed his eyes. He heard the opening notes of the song he heard for the first time.

He does not know how long the song has been playing or has ended but he finally opened his eyes.

Lan Qiren saw a face he did not expect to see.

“Cangse...”

And then another one.

"Changze."

Then he heard her speak.

"From now on you will be our A-Ying. Our Wei Ying. Aren't you the cutest one?"

Lan Qiren realized that he was like a spirit that was beside... beside the baby. He could see his face. His name is A-Ying... Wei Ying and he is Cangse Sanren and Wei Changze's son.

The last time he heard of them was when Wei Changze defected from Yunmeng-Jiang. He received a letter from Wei Changze at that time, informing him that he will be leaving Yunmeng-Jiang and will be a rogue cultivator with his wife so he should not send any letters addressed to him in Lotus Pier. Lan Qiren usually just sends letters when he finds the books that Wei Changze liked. The previous head disciple of Yunmeng-Jiang asked for his help in gathering those books since Gusu has an abundance of published literary works.

Lan Qiren watched as Wei Ying's life was unveiled in front of him. How he received the love and care from his parents as well as how they brought him on their travels. He felt bad each time they left him in the inns when they went on night hunts. Lan Qiren stayed with the child until they returned.

Then Wei Ying turned four and they were in Yiling. He waited with him after the couple left and promised that they would be back after the hunt.

A week passed and the innkeeper kicked Wei Ying out.

"A-niang and a-die said they'll come back!"

The four-year-old cried but the innkeeper did not mind him. The room was not paid anymore and someone had to use it.

Little Wei Ying walked around the streets. Lan Qiren felt bad for the child and could see how cold he felt. The snow was getting heavier that winter. He was wearing the same dark blue robes he was wearing when he found him. Lan Qiren wondered how he reached Gusu from Yiling.

But he didn't and Lan Qiren felt an alarm rise in his head.

Wei Ying was not even wearing his dark blue robes anymore. He was given shabby robes by a market vendor when the market vendor saw his tattered robes, saying that it was owned by her son before. He threw the robes he was wearing as it was torn by the dog's teeth after the

small child had to fight his way to take the food that he was cleaning up when the wild dog arrived.

Lan Qiren continued to follow little Wei Ying and he couldn't help but feel the pain that little Wei Ying was going through.

He counted three years of living in the street, trying to fend for himself, and not once has Wei Ying gone further than the outskirts of Yiling. Not once has he stepped foot in Gusu.

Lan Qiren *felt* that something was wrong.

One day, they bumped into someone while Wei Ying was running from stray dogs. Lan Qiren knew who it was.

"Are you Wei Ying?"

It was Jiang Fengmian.

This time, Lan Qiren *definitely* knew that something was wrong.

Lan Qiren watched how Wei Ying began his life in Lotus Pier. He watched how Jiang Cheng pushed him out of his room and Wei Ying ran away. How Jiang Yanli found him and made them reconcile.

He watched how Yu Ziyuan *treated* Wei Ying and Lan Qiren regretted that he was just a floating spirit. He winced and felt every pain that Wei Ying was going through.

He watched how he grew up as a sword and as a shield by the entire family. He watched how Wei Ying grew up without knowing what self-love is. He watched how Wei Ying grew up as Wei Wuxian. He watched everything that went wrong while growing up.

He watched every single whip that Wei Wuxian received, he stayed with him every time he had to kneel in the ancestral hall, he listened to every insult he was receiving.

All Lan Qiren could do was grip his fist.

He watched news after news coming in Lotus Pier.

The first one was the death of his sister-in-law.

"Madam Lan is dead. Go send our condolences to the Lan Sect."

Then Nie Yongwu, the Sect Leader of the Nie Sect died.

“Go send our condolences to Qinghe-Nie. It will now be led by Nie Mingjue, Nie Yongwu’s eldest son.”

Then shortly after that, his brother’s death.

“Qinghengjun died in seclusion. Gusu-Lan is now officially led by Lan Qiren until his oldest nephew is ready to take over.”

The first time they met – they saw each other was during the archery competition where he came with Lan Huan who received the courtesy name Xichen. According to the *gossip* that Wei Wuxian heard, Lan Zhan received the courtesy name Wangji and he was not able to come because he was in secluded meditation.

They did not interact aside from the formal greetings.

Then he watched the time where finally, the Yunmeng-Jiang Sect attended the lectures.

Lan Qiren’s brows twitched with how unruly Wei Wuxian was. He does not follow any of the rules but he has obviously memorized them. He has found ways to break them without getting caught or punished.

He was the *bane* of his existence. Probably the most unruly student he could get. He had to compare the Wei Wuxian he saw in Lotus Pier and the Wei Wuxian in Cloud Recesses.

He knew what went wrong.

Yet the Lan Qiren he could see is a pedantic man who had to be the Sect Leader until his nephew was ready to take the position from him. The Lan Qiren he could see was built with rules and strictness and he has truly imparted them to his nephews. He wonders how he raised them... but he could already see it through Wei Wuxian.

He watched everything unfold.

And he saw how his youngest nephew tied his ribbon around Wei Wuxian’s wrist in front of Lan Yi’s spirit. They bowed and took the Yin Iron from her and then her spirit vanished.

Lan Qiren knew about the Yin Iron. It was discussed with him and his brother.

And he also saw the way his nephew looked at Wei Wuxian. Lan Qiren swallowed hard. He has seen that look before – it was the same way his brother looked at his sister-in-law the few times he saw them.

Oh.

Lan Qiren then saw their journey to find the Yin Iron.

He saw them arrive in Qinghe where Nie Mingjue informed Wangji of Xichen's letter. He saw his nephew leave while Wei Wuxian pretended to sleep on his roof.

Oh.

He listened to Yu Ziyuan again.

He saw the indoctrination. His nephew walked with a broken leg.

Cloud Recesses was burned. Lan Qiren cannot process everything but he had to continue.

He wanted to protect Wei Wuxian inside the dungeon but he could barely do anything. He almost sighed in relief when he saw Wen Qionglin, the friend Wei Wuxian made in Cloud Recesses help him.

He watched them defeat the Xuanwu.

He watched the panicked look on his nephew's face as Wei Wuxian went down with fever.

"Lan Zhan, what's the name of the song?"

"Wangxian."

Then everything went dark.

Oh.

He watched Wang Lingjiao arrive at Lotus Pier and how Yu Ziyuan whipped Wei Wuxian nonstop. Lan Qiren's frustration could have led him to qi deviation if he was not a spirit. He tried pushing her away, he tried to cover Wei Wuxian yet – yet he was whipped nonstop.

He watched her slap Wei Wuxian after she hugged her son. She blamed him and asked him to protect her son with his life.

He watched Jiang Fengmian do the same.

He watched Jiang Cheng – Jiang Wanyin choke Wei Wuxian on the ground.

He watched them enter the inn.

He watched Wei Wuxian save Jiang Wanyin from Lotus Pier with the help of Wen Qionglin.

Lan Qiren watched in horror as Wen Qing, the sister of Wen Qionglin ripped out Wei Wuxian's core while he was awake and transferred it to Jiang Wanyin who did not know about it.

Lan Qiren listened to the ear-piercing scream and felt the pain that Wei Wuxian was feeling. Lan Qiren knew he could have cried if he could.

He watched Wei Wuxian get thrown in the Burial Mounds after Wen Chao had his fun torturing him.

He watched – he watched *everything* that happened in the Burial Mounds... he saw an idea thrown in class was made into reality. Lan Qiren watched in horror. He watched how he crawled out of the place.

It has been three months.

He watched the first time Wei Wuxian met Jiang Wanyin who now had his core and his nephew.

“Come back to Gusu with me.”

Oh.

Lan Qiren knew why Wei Wuxian wouldn't. He is one of the reasons and Lan Qiren despised himself for it. He was his teacher... if – if only he was better. Wei Wuxian needed help... he badly needed help and he was spiraling down and Lan Qiren – Lan Qiren knows that if he brought him to nainai... nainai would know what to do.

Lan Qiren found himself gripping his fist tighter with hopes that he could punish himself for what the version of him has done.

He watched the war unfold.

He watched his nephew watch the *love of his life* turned into something that he does not know how to describe. He does not know what to do aside... aside from bringing him to Gusu. He does not know if his nephew would know what to do after bringing him to Gusu but he supports this decision. He truly does.

He watched Wei Wuxian hurt himself in the process. Aside from the new path of cultivation – he saw him hurt himself each time to reject his nephew.

Oh.

Lan Qiren is in his twenties and all he could remember was spending his teenage years studying and night hunting. He cannot imagine himself fighting a war like how he is witnessing his nephews, Wei Wuxian, and the rest are doing.

He watched how the war ended with a flute, a seal, and a flexible sword.

He watched how Wei Wuxian was a celebrated hero and how he spiraled down more in Lotus Pier.

He watched the differences between Jiang Wanyin and Wei Wuxian. He watched how Jiang Yanli became the mediator... as always.

He watched his elder nephew meet Wei Wuxian in Yunmeng. He wondered why it was not Wangji but he listened to the conversation with hopes that Xichen could convince Wei Wuxian where Wangji failed.

He did not.

He watched the Phoenix Mountain Hunt. He watched how the Jins that hid most of the war aside from Jin Zixuan and his mother's cohort of disciples... are now acting as if they are *the new sun*.

Lan Qiren watched in horror as Wei Wuxian met Wen Qing and everything that happened after that.

He truly wished that Wei Wuxian would not return to the Burial Mounds but he did and brought the group of Wens with him. Together with them is a child – a baby in Qiren's eyes.

He watched them try to build a home and Lan Qiren wanted them to stop. This place – this place could never be home.

When Jiang Wanyin arrived, Lan Qiren almost felt relief... not. Jiang Wanyin berated him and Wei Wuxian defected.

Lan Qiren knew it was something he has been hoping for ever since he saw how little Wei Ying was treated in Lotus Pier.

But this also meant that he did not have any support anymore.

His eyes widened when he felt the stab and watch him walk back to the settlement with a stab on his abdomen.

He watched Wei Wuxian make both ends meet while pushing himself more with the new cultivation path. Lan Qiren could tell that he was greatly affected by demonic cultivation.

"Resentful energy harms the mind and body, the temperament even more."

What his nephew said is true... and he knows that Wei Wuxian knew it as well.

"There will be a price learning wicked tricks. No exception throughout history."

Lan Qiren was afraid of what price Wei Wuxian would have to pay.

Then his nephew met Wei Wuxian in Yiling, with them was little A-Yuan who has wormed in Lan Qiren's heart. Lan Qiren felt something in his heart while he watched them eat.

A family.

Then the alarm happened. Wen Qionglin's consciousness was brought back. If you would ask Lan Qiren, he would wish for him to rest in peace instead. But seeing how things turned out, he understood – he clearly understood the cry of a sister who lost everything and a person who *thought* he lost everything. If they could bring back something to ground them, they would... and for Wen Qing (and Wei Wuxian) it is Wen Qionglin.

At the same time, Lan Qiren hoped that Wei Wuxian could see his nephew... and his nephew could learn how to express himself (and here, Lan Qiren knew he was to be blamed. However he raised Xichen and Wangji, it was not right.)

"Attempt the impossible."

Lan Qiren heard Wei Wuxian say that a lot of times and there were moments that he wanted to cover his lips to stop saying that.

He could imagine Wei Changze shaking his head. He could imagine Cangse Sanren's disapproving gaze. No parent would want to see their child suffer this way.

He listened to the title given to Wei Wuxian and he felt how it did not fit the *real* Wei Wuxian. Yiling Patriarch. Lan Qiren shook his head. As much as it implies great power, Lan Qiren knew it was spoken out of spite most of the time.

He watched Wei Wuxian meet Jiang Yanli in her wedding dress.

He hated how he *expected* something more... especially with how Jiang Yanli was supposed to be the *best sister in the world* according to Wei Wuxian... and yet nothing happened. They went back to the Burial Mounds with a clarity bell and a bowl of soup.

He waited... he waited for his nephew to return but he didn't. The invitation came instead.

And things spiraled down even more.

Death after death after death and he knows – he knows that if the version of himself was probably one of those who greatly judged Wei Wuxian and his actions. Starting from the impression he gave during the lectures, his actions during the war, and the aftermath.

Lan Qiren could only shut his eyes. He failed... he failed this Wei Wuxian. As Wei Changze and Cangse Sanren's friend, as his teacher, as an elder... Lan Qiren failed.

He watched his nephew try to stop Wei Wuxian from falling.

He watched how Jiang Wanyin stabbed the rock.

He watched how Wei Wuxian let go.

He listened to how his nephew screamed his name while Wei Wuxian had a *resigned* expression on his face.

Then everything turned black.

Lan Qiren thought he would wake but instead, when the light started to illuminate his vision, he realized that he was in a room. There was a huge array – a summoning circle on the ground and the room was filled with talismans. When Lan Qiren looked around he saw him – *Wei Wuxian*.

He was summoned back to life. It has been 16 years since then.

Lan Qiren saw Gusu-Lan disciples in the manor. One of them looked familiar, he could imagine him as a grandson of one of his distant cousins. His name was Lan Jingyi and with him is Lan Sizhui and Lan Qiren cannot help but feel a familiarity with the disciple. His actions... his thought process – it felt like Xichen and Wangji combined based on the personalities that interacted with Wei Wuxian in his *first life*.

He watched Wei Wuxian protect the Gusu-Lan disciples until his nephew arrived.

He saw it again.

Love.

Yearning.

Oh .

As he watched everything unfold once more, Lan Qiren knew one thing.

This was Wei Wuxian's second life and his nephew has promised himself to stand by his side whatever happened.

The more that he sees Lan Sizhui and his similarities with his nephews as well as his closeness with Wangji... Lan Qiren felt a tug in his heart.

Does Wei Wuxian realize it as well or is it just him?

When he learned the young disciple's courtesy name... he immediately confirmed his thoughts.

Who – who made it possible? He was just a child who turned three at that time. The answer is obvious to him though. His nephew could have held onto the only living person associated with Wei Wuxian who loves and values him as much as Lan Wangji does... *his husband* in the eyes of Gusu-Lan Sect no matter what their age was during the wedding. It was done in front of their great ancestor and first female Sect Leader after all.

Sizhui – to recollect and to long for.

Wangji even bestowed him with such an emotional yet beautiful courtesy name.

He listened to Xichen tell Wei Wuxian the story of the young Lan Zhan's life after Liu Meiyue's death. He listened to him talk about the punishment of Wangji. He could imagine himself giving that punishment while questioning his nephew about their rules. The 52nd rule entered his mind.

Do not befriend evil.

And Wei Wuxian was seen as evil by everyone, including himself. Lan Qiren felt disgusted with himself. He should have known better. He should have opened his eyes to see clearly. He was disappointed with himself.

He could imagine the punishment was given because Wangji hurt his fellow cultivators just to protect Wei Wuxian... and whatever he did to save the little A-Yuan, Lan Qiren could only guess. The punishment could have been *just* because what he did was wrong... if only Wei Wuxian was truly wrong.

But no... he was wronged... by everyone, by the world and because of it, he lost everything he kept dearly. At that time, Lan Qiren actually imagined the life he would be watching was going to be a repeated cycle of eating radishes, tending the lotus pond, Wei Wuxian staying up until he just passed out of exhaustion, and playing with little A-Yuan.

The world has failed Wei Wuxian and he paid the price for it.

Listening to the truth behind everything broke something inside Lan Qiren.

When the truth was revealed, he also saw how broken Xichen was. He already saw it a few times that he interacted with Wei Wuxian but now... he was just too broken that Lan Qiren feared when he announced seclusion. He lost Nie Mingjue, the man whom he held dearly in his heart because of their sworn brother who must have wormed in his heart as well.

Lan Qiren knew he could have cried if he could after Lan Yuan courtesy name Sizhui hugged his Xian-gege's leg and then transferred to Rich-gege, Hanguangjun's leg. They looked like a *perfect family*.

Lan Qiren's brows furrowed when Wei Wuxian left Gusu. He almost tried to tug his robes to stop him from leaving after he parted ways with his nephew who was now the Chief Cultivator on top of the mountain.

Why?

Wangji did not even tell him that they were married!

Qiren almost stomped his feet if he was not floating. They have waited and pinned long enough! Why are they parting?!

Lan Qiren cannot imagine his life with someone as what his nephew and Wei Wuxian had. The true love and devotion remind Qiren of his brother and sister-in-law who fell in love but were put in such a situation that caused their current situation.

He floated with Wei Wuxian with the donkey and Qiren waited but his nephew did not stop them. It felt like parting but it also felt like it was not.

Then they went to travel and Qiren realized why. Wei Wuxian wanted to see the world again and his nephew let him spread his wings. He had a small flicker of golden core from the sacrifice made by Mo Xuanyu, one of Jin Guangshan's illegitimate children. He was able to bring back Wei Wuxian's body and soul. Mo Xuanyu's body fulfilled what was missing in Wei Wuxian. His unscarred skin, his core, his life became Wei Wuxian's. Wei Wuxian studied how Mo Xuanyu did it and Lan Qiren feared for the reason that he does not say. He felt relieved when Wei Wuxian burned it after.

"Now that I know how I was brought back, it is better that no one knows about this. It ends with Mo Xuanyu and I. May he rest in peace."

The soul of Mo Xuanyu shattered and will never reincarnate again.

A year later, Lan Qiren found them back on the same mountain, and when Wei Wuxian played the *same song that made his nephew realize who the masked man was*... Lan Qiren found himself smiling.

"Wei Ying."

Lan Qiren could already imagine a wedding in red.

"Wangxian."

"Lan Zhan?"

"The name of that song. Wangxian."

Lan Qiren had to close his eyes and cover his ears when the two reached the Jingshi. It would be a total nightmare for him. He knew Lans were known to be repressed but he did not expect his nephew to have such an *active* sex life with Wei Wuxian.

The wedding happened in a bigger set-up than just their bows in front of Lan Yi because yes, the Chief Cultivator's wedding needed to be *grand* .

They officially adopted Lan Sizhui as their child although he was already written as Lan Wangji's son and heir in Gusu-Lan's registry. They only added Wei Wuxian's name. He calls Wei Wuxian baba, he calls Lan Wangji a-die. Wei Wuxian teased him to call him a-niang like he did when they first met Wangji in Yiling. The moment it came out of Lan Sizhui's lips, Wei Wuxian turned red and Lan Qiren felt so much warmth in his heart. *Family*.

As the Chief Cultivator, Wangji had to deal with the cultivation world daily. Then a case happened where he personally went with some juniors and his husband. Lan Qiren's spirit, of course, went with them.

There was a plague caused by a hermit who died out of spite. His spirit was causing a ruckus in the town as he hated everyone. Some cultivators who tried to deal with his spirit also suffered the same fate.

It was not simple but Lan Wangji and Wei Wuxian were not considered the strongest cultivators alive to not be able to come up with a solution. Even Qiren learned a lot on that night hunt. He was impressed.

They met the last living victim of the plague. The rest has unfortunately passed and the old woman was also on her deathbed. She looked surprised when she saw them. She grabbed Wangji's wrist, much to everyone's surprise.

"You are Liu Meiyue's son."

"Ma'am please--"

"You know my mother."

"I – I – heavens... this – this must be my karma for – for what I did all those year- years ago."

"Lan Zhan..."

"What – what did you do?"

"Lan Zhan..."

"I – Liu Meiyue... I – poisoned her. She – she killed —"

It happened so fast. Her eyeballs rolled back, she spitted blood, and then she took her last breath.

Yet the information she revealed was a total shock to everyone, even to Lan Qiren. He does not know how she died and just heard about it in Lotus Pier.

Lan Qiren watched how his nephew and Wei Wuxian scanned through all the records, including medical, and death records about Liu Meiyue. Her cause of death was failing health and no other records were stated.

Lan Qiren watched how Lan Wangji cried in Wei Wuxian's embrace at the memory of the mother that he lost. Lan Wangji knelt outside the Hanshi until it snowed and Lan Qiren was reminded of Xichen's story about how little A-Zhan knelt and waited for the door of the Gentry House that would never open.

Lan Qiren cannot believe what happened. Where was he when it happened?

Their lives continued.

His nephew resigned as the Chief Cultivator five years after he was put into the position.

He watched as Wei Wuxian brought Lan Xichen out of seclusion after he was able to do something after he spent hours in the library and his own scribbles. Wei Wuxian was able to create a song to help Lan Xichen call for Nie Mingjue's soul. Lan Xichen cried himself to sleep in his brother's embrace. Wangji told him that it reminded him of all those years ago when Lan Xichen held him while he grieved for Wei Wuxian's death.

Lan Qiren reached out to pat his nephew even though he could not feel it.

Lan Qiren watched himself slowly softening to Wei Wuxian as they shared afternoon tea and talked about their students, their lessons. Wei Wuxian is an outstanding teacher and he could see how adorable the students were towards him.

He watched the flustered novices shyly give Hanguangjun's husband flowers, candies, painting, and paper foldings. He is well-loved by disciples of all ages. Even if having favorites and bias is forbidden, Wei-laoshi is secretly everyone's favorite. Wei Wuxian would flaunt it in front of his husband and son when they shared dinner in the Jingshi.

Lan Qiren watched how people important in his life taught Wei Wuxian what self-love is and he felt happy to see that Wei Wuxian finally learned and valued himself.

And then on one passing event, Wei Wuxian felt a strong punch on his gut when Jiang Wanyin, drunk and wasted in a discussion conference in Lotus Pier started to talk. The revelation of how he distracted the Wens who were supposed to capture Wei Wuxian has shaken him to his core. He tried to reach out even more but Jiang Wanyin has wallowed himself in pain, grief, and grudge that forgiveness and chance seemed to be foreign words to him.

Wei Wuxian apologized, he *almost begged* if it was for his husband and son because truly, he once considered this man as his brother but it bore no fruit.

Heaven knows how much he tried but the rift between them seemed to have grown bigger. Their relationship never *improved* no matter how much he tried.

Lan Qiren watched with different emotions and thoughts running in his mind.

"You have done enough, Wei Ying. The revelation could have mattered decades ago... but you have paid with more than just your life for what Yunmeng-Jiang, Jiang Yanli, and Jiang Wanyin have done for you. Enough is enough."

"Baba, his happiness is not your responsibility. I am old enough to learn everything that happened in the past and I know... I know that you have done enough, baba. If Jiang-zongzhu -- if Jiang-zongzhu does not wish to move on and lighten the burden in his heart, it is not your fault anymore."

"A-Xian, brother-in-law... through the years, you have learned what self-love is. Remind yourself of that. Love yourself more than you love others, isn't this what you told me before?"

"Wei Wuxian, a debt is over once it is paid. You paid with your life, with your cultivation, and with your own happiness. You and I, your husband, your son, Xichen, we are not blind. We all know that you have paid more than what you received."

Wei Wuxian and Jin Rulan somehow have a better relationship than anyone expected. He still sees him as his nephew and Jin Rulan *surprisingly* looks up to him to the point that he even asks for his counsel at times.

Lan Qiren felt bad for the child. He is too young to bear too much responsibility. Yet again, his predecessors are not entirely different. They even fought a war and faced two power-hungry leaders.

Years passed by and Lan Qiren began to wonder how the small child ended up in Caiyi. He watched Wei Wuxian's life prosper in Gusu-Lan as a teacher and as a husband. Lan Wangji worked hard to make Cloud Recesses a place for his husband to live. He *removed* elders that were insulting his husband by exposing dirt behind their names. With more interactions with him, Wei Wuxian was slowly accepted by the elders too.

He is someone who could easily worm into the hearts of people especially when you are willing to accept him.

He watched how Wei Wuxian tried his best but could never improve Mo Xuanyu's core and finally... finally, Lan Wangji brought him to Nainai whom Wei Wuxian first met in his second life after he fed his donkey, Little Apple in the back hills.

Nainai helped Wei Wuxian and slowly... he regained his original vigor and his core improved. Lan Qiren watched how Wei Wuxian cried the moment he unsheathed Suibian that was brought to Gusu by Jin Rulan when he attended the lectures. Lan Qiren watched how Wei Wuxian cried the moment he crossed swords with Wangji as if they were teenagers again, fighting on rooftops and the cliff near the falls in the back hills.

When Wei Wuxian was 16, he could never imagine himself living in Cloud Recesses, as part of Gusu-Lan. The thought of it irked him to the bones and it made Lan Qiren huff.

Yet look at him now. He is living the best life as Hanguangjun's husband. He is one of Gusu-Lan's renowned teachers and is greatly acknowledged by Lan Qiren.

Then there was a reported disturbance in the burial site where they buried the casket from Yunping and the couple went with their son who was preparing to take over the sect leadership from Lan Xichen the following year. Xichen tried to delay it as much as he could as he did not wish for Sizhui to get a heavy responsibility at a young age. Qiren knew that he did it as well. Lan Xichen only became Lan-zongzhu in Wei Wuxian's second life.

They dug out the casket and removed the half-reforged seal.

“Lan Zhan... this is the last yin iron shard that Xue Yang owned. We need to destroy it.”

Lan Qiren is aware of the number of lives that were taken when Wei Wuxian first destroyed the original seal.

He watched the family of three study and create music to destroy the seal -- the Yin Iron. If Wei Wuxian learned how to use music to manipulate resentful energy, they could come up with a song to destroy a tool that was empowered by resentful energy as well.

They have created a song. With a powerful demonic cultivator that could manipulate any resentful energy and two powerful qin players with pure spiritual energy, the seal turned into dust.

"If only I knew this was possible before."

He watched how Lan Sizhui took the mantle of sect leadership and got married to a lady named Ouyang Lian, one of Ouyang Zizhen's sisters who had the same personality as Wei Wuxian. The way she *followed* (pester) Sizhui around reminded Lan Qiren of Wei Wuxian and his nephew. The only difference is that Sizhui was too nice to *ignore* her and call her "boring," "ridiculous" and "shameless."

They also have a three-year-old daughter, A-Yue whom everyone in the family doted so much, especially Lan Qiren.

"Granduncle, you used to do this to me a lot too. A-Yue is going to be really spoiled."

Lan Qiren could imagine it. A child as sweet as little A-Yuan who lost his memories must have easily wormed in his heart. He imagined himself giving him candies when he does a good job as he could recall what his sister-in-law did to A-Huan and A-Zhan before.

He watched himself give little A-Yue candies to her heart content.

In the past 14 years of Wei Wuxian and Wangji's marriage, they watched Sizhui prosper as one of the most powerful cultivators of his generation.

The couple would go where the chaos is, either as a couple or with their son who has learned to turn blind eyes when they start to be *too much* with their public display of affection. In his first life, going to where the chaos is together was just their dream but in his second life, they were finally able to fulfill such a dream. Lan Qiren joined them on every adventure.

Lan Qiren was still teaching during important lessons but he has settled into seclusion more where he writes books to preserve knowledge for the future generation. Lan Jingyi, as much as how he was labeled as the most un-Lan of all Lans, has followed his footsteps on being a great teacher to the disciples and Sizhui's adviser.

Lan Xichen was doing the things he failed to do in his youth -- traveling. He also played the song that Wei Wuxian taught him to see if there are traces of Nie Mingjue's spirit or anyone

who was able to interact with him before. These little facts already brought happiness to his nephew.

He also saw how Wen Qionglin had his own house in the residential area of Cloud Recesses. He shared his knowledge of healing to the Medical Pavilion of Cloud Recesses and he would often go on night hunts to accompany the disciples. He had been doing it since Lan Sizhui was just a junior disciple and now, the younger disciples of Gusu-Lan. The sentient fierce corpse was a constant presence around Cloud Recesses and everyone was fine with that. His nephew made sure of it.

Lan Qiren watched as Wei Wuxian reunited with Nie Huaisang after years of the Guanyin incident. He and Xichen played the song he made to reach out to Nie Mingjue. Nie Huaisang and Lan Xichen have mended their relationship after everything. Lan Qiren watched the younger Nie call his nephew *er-ge* once more.

For Wei Wuxian, even if he did not wish for someone to die to bring him back to life, they have all been jaded and gray with their own beliefs and principles and so he'll still be thankful for what Huaisang has done to bring him back. Every year on the day of his resurrection, he would light incense and give offerings to Mo Xuanyu and even to his mother. Lan Qiren also whispered a little prayer.

Like every night since his return and their marriage... in the safety of Jingshi, Wei Wuxian clad in a white Gusu-Lan sleeping robe was snuggled closer to his husband's embrace. Earlier, they ate dinner with their son, daughter-in-law, and granddaughter who is way too talkative for a three years old child. After dinner, they discussed publishing the latest book that Lan Qiren finished, discussed disciples and sect matters and they read the respective letters that Lan Xichen sent from his travels.

"Goodnight, Lan Zhan. See you tomorrow!"

"Goodnight. See you tomorrow, Wei Ying."

Lan Qiren's vision also turns black each time Wei Wuxian sleeps.

But when they opened their eyes, Lan Qiren felt it – he felt what Wei Wuxian felt. It was different from how he was feeling earlier.

This time, Lan Qiren felt like *he* was Wei Wuxian. His body was doing the same as what Wei Wuxian was doing. It was not just feeling but Lan Qiren could also hear his thoughts now.

Wei Wuxian woke up feeling himself shrink. He was too disoriented when he looked around to find himself in an inn.

No, he ate dinner with his husband, son, daughter-in-law, and granddaughter in the Jingshi. He kissed his husband goodnight and told him *see you tomorrow* .

Then his thoughts went to his a-niang and a-die who promised to return after the night hunt so little A-Ying should stay in the room and eat the food they delivered because they were paid in advance.

He started crying with his thoughts jumbled going back and forth from the grown-up Wei Wuxian and little A-Ying.

Lan Qiren felt it and two words entered his mind.

Time travel.

While he was crying, the innkeeper entered the room and started to demand little A-Ying to leave.

"A-niang and a-die said they'll come back!"

Little A-Ying cried and Lan Qiren felt the pain when the innkeeper pushed him out.

Then little A-Ying ran to the side alley, crying. Lan Qiren could feel little A-Ying's body turning warm, he was developing a fever and Qiren knew that it was not just because of the weather.

Whatever happened was causing this.

And then he saw movements and when A-Ying turned around, Lan Qiren did the same. It was a split second but he saw and recognized her face.

Yu Ziyuan.

And everything turned black.

The next time little A-Ying opened his eyes, he was already in the medical pavilion of Cloud Recesses and Qiren saw himself caring for the child.

Ah.

He watched what transpired in the past few weeks until the child they called *xiao-peng you* or little friend. It was Lan Ji who started calling him that and the other apprentices adopted it and so Qiren started calling him that as well though he wished to call him by his name.

Then finally, the day when Lan Qiren decided to listen to the *Song of Recollection* happened.

When Lan Qiren opened his eyes, he was surprised to have nainai seated beside him, sending him her spiritual energy with Lan Ji busily poking needles on him.

“Na-“

“You qi deviated three times. You screamed a lot of times. Your pulse fluctuated,” Lan Ji cut him off as she poked him another needle.

“It was bad,” Nainai met his eyes. He does not know if Nainai knew or she saw it but he knew that she was talking about what he saw and so he nodded.

“Yes.”

“Rest.”

“But-“

“I will talk to you after Ji-er deems you healthy enough. I will find someone to cover for your responsibilities and I will continue to care for your nephews. The child will be safe here. Rest, A-Ren.”

“Mn.”

He gave Wei Ying a glance on the bed beside him.

“You’ve been through a lot, little one...I am sorry and thank you.”

And Lan Qiren closed his eyes.

Chapter End Notes



Please-please-please be careful, stay healthy (drink vitamins/strengthen your immune system if you can), and have a nice day💕

Chapter 8

Chapter Notes

Hello!

F-I-N-A-L-L-Y marking this complete yaaay!

I was halfway through my first fic, Until the End when I started to ignore the word count of my fics nfsdnfld if no one mentioned that it was around 60k from the last chap, I wouldn't notice and now it just... got way too long from my initial plan lol

Anyway, here it is! I really just want to say thank you to everyone who is reading this fic. When I first started it, I never expected you guys to read it but here we are now so thank you so much 🙏💖🙏

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“Do you believe that time travel could happen, nainai?”

It was his first question the moment he was finally able to talk to nainai. She laughed.

“There are a lot of unexplainable phenomena that happen in this world, A-Ren.”

“But is it possible?”

“The future is not set on a stone.”

“Nainai.”

“You think you saw him time travel.”

“There is nothing I could think of aside from that... even if studies do not believe that it could happen.”

“One glance at him and I saw that he had an old soul but a young and innocent mind.”

“Nainai...”

“As I have said, there are a lot of unexplainable phenomena – unexplainable things in our lives that sometimes, we just have to live with, A-Ren.”

“What do I do?”

“The future is not set on a stone.”

“I wish – I wish to change what I saw. I – I do not want him to live such a life. I want -- I want to correct myself and I want to change things, Nainai.”

“And you have done it the moment you brought him in Cloud Recesses, A-Ren.”

“I do not know how he ended up in Gusu. He was... he was supposed to stay in Yiling for two years until Jiang-zongzhu found him.”

“Again, there are a lot of unexplainable phenomena. It is up to you what you would like to think of and focus on first.”

Lan Qiren thought of Yu Ziyuan and what she was doing in Yiling at that time. He thought about how Wei Ying saw her in split second and then everything turned dark. In Wei Ying’s past, he stayed in that alley for hours until he could not stand the hunger and started looking for food. There was no Yu Ziyuan that showed up.

“Could it be...”

But Lan Qiren chose to leave that for later. He focused on Wei Ying. He was determined to change things – to change the life that Wei Ying lived. Not just his but the people important in him and in Wei Ying’s life. He does not know why everything was happening but he would live with it... he would try to live with it.

“Your name is Wei Ying. Your mother’s name is Cangse and your father’s name is Wei Changze. They were my friends.”

It was hard to inform a child of what happened to his parents and how he actually lost his memories about them. Wei Ying cried in his embrace.

“Do you like it here, A-Ying?”

When he received a nod, Lan Qiren knew it was time to put his plans to action.

“I will take you as my ward. I will be your guardian and you can call me shushu. I will try my best to honor your parents’ memories by raising you, A-Ying. Thank you... thank you for coming to my life.”

Because Lan Qiren is truly thankful. This – this felt like a second chance and he would not waste it. Not when the chance was given to him this way.

He would treat Wei Ying like his son like he did with his nephews. As much as he wanted to officially adopt him and give him his name like Wangji did to little A-Yuan, the thought of how he will be his future in-law entered his mind. As a Lan, Lan Qiren believes in *soulmates*. He does not know if he has one but he knows that A-Zhan and A-Ying are soulmates and so one way or another... it will be made possible in this timeline. He does not wish for complications on that.

He'll take him as a ward but he would not treat him like how Jiang Fengmian did. He saw himself in that memory, in that timeline. He only became nice to him after everything that happened. But A-Ying is just a child who is very sweet and easy to love.

The more that he saw changes in him, he figured out that Wei Ying grew up that way not because he believed that he was Cangse Sanren's son and so he became free-spirited, unruly, untamed, without self-love and self-preservation, a rule-breaker, and more. It was because of everything he went through with the Jiangs that he grew up that way.

He pledged that A-Ying will never grow up or experience whatever he experienced in his first and second life. Lan Qiren will stand by him and not allow him to reach a point where he will have no other options in life.

He took good care of him and stayed by his bedside each time he relapsed. Lan Qiren felt like a real parent and he could hear Cangse's voice in his head, teasing him. He could imagine Wei Changze's thankful gazes and nods. Lan Qiren hoped he could do it well.

He is a master of the six arts and he has a good hand in painting. He created portraits of the two for Wei Ying to know what they look like. He watched as the child softly caressed their faces. Jiang Fengmian never told him how they died aside from they died on a night hunt.

When he found the chance, he went to talk to his brother and he told him about Wei Ying and what he saw in his memories. Lan Qijun was shaken but he was determined to change things as much as Lan Qiren did. If Lan Wangji had Lan Xichen in his life, Lan Qiren had his xiongzhang. They lost their parents at a young age and A-Huan and A-Zhan experienced it in that timeline too. This time, Lan Qiren would not allow that to happen. He also gave them another family member, his precious ward (and their future in-law), Wei Ying.

He also told Liu Meiyue and she offered help for Wei Ying's recovery too. That was the time he started bringing him to the monthly visits of A-Huan and A-Zhan to the Gentian House.

Then when Liu Meiyue was cleared out of the poison and they worked hard to fix the members of the Council of Elders (Qiren learned a lot from how Wangji did it before), they finally decided to plan on what to do.

The war, it must not happen.

Wen Rouhan must be stopped.

And so their first focus was the Yin Irons.

It was simply too late for the Dancing Fairy Statue. Liu Meiyue left Cloud Recesses in secret and went there as a rogue cultivator who passed by and the devastation that was caused by Wen Rouhan after taking the shard from the heart of the fairy already happened.

But Qiren successfully found Xue Yang. He was still a child, four years old like Wei Ying when he found him. He had a pouch heavily warded and strapped on his waist. He found him

in Kuizhou together with other kids who were bullying him and he was not fighting back, simply hugging and retreating to himself. Qiren realized that this child was not molded by hardship in life yet.

Qiren also knew that he had not met the Chang clan yet, his little fingers were still complete.

“Where is your guardian?”

“Dead.”

“Do you know how?”

“Hunger. Gave A-Yang food.”

It did not take much time to convince the child to come with him, a cultivator in white who would give him food and shelter. Lan Qiren was surprised when A-Yang gave him the pouch he had.

“Why?”

“Pay.”

“You do not have to pay. I am helping you willingly, for free.”

“No. Pay. Popo said to give back kindness. Pay.”

Just like that, Qiren got the second shard. The first one was still kept in their cold pond cave.

His brother went to the florist and successfully brought the yin iron shard with him. He could already imagine what kind of sappy poem his brother recited that must be about his wife.

They agreed that the sword inside the Xuanwu could be dealt with later. It would be too suspicious if they killed the Xuanwu residing in Qishan for centuries.

They brought the shards in Lan Yi’s cave and called for Lan Yi’s spirit. As much as he wishes for her to show up and witness the marriage of his nephew and ward, this matter is more important than romance (but could result in a better romance between his nephew and ward if they do things right).

He honestly explained to Lan Yi how they got the shards.

“There is a song... I... I will need to learn it first and teach my brother. It requires a huge amount of energy so it will take time... but as long as we keep them here and warded, no one could take them away.”

Lan Qiren learned some heavy wards from Wei Wuxian by following his life. He warded each pouch that kept the shard and then he warded the cave better. His brother and sister-in-law were impressed but he just huffed.

Lan Yi's spirit vanished but she left parts of her essence to protect the cave and Cloud Recesses.

"My essence could help withhold sudden attacks. In the timeline that you said... I must have failed to do that before I left because my spirit could have been too weak by the time I met them. We shall protect our home better. I wish you luck and success. Gusu-Lan is lucky to still produce righteous disciples."

They have done everything behind the elders' backs. Once they had secured the shards in the cave, that was the only time that Liu Meiyue said that she was ready to talk to the elders.

She told them about what happened and Qiren suggested the Song of Recollection. Everyone was surprised but with Lan Qijun's insistence and Liu Meiyue's open agreement, Qiren played the song he learned from nainai and it was their uncle who saw through Liu Meiyue's memories.

She was cleared and those who attempted to kill Liu Meiyue were submitted to face Gusu-Law outside Cloud Recesses and yes, including Lan Jianhong's illegitimate child.

Lan Qiren realized that he could see a glimpse while playing but they were mostly blurry patches of memories. He does not know what their uncle saw in Liu Meiyue's memories but he saw how he changed, how the elders changed their treatment to his sister-in-law. He saw a huge amount of respect and Lan Qiren thinks... his sister-in-law deserves that.

Liu Meiyue finally and officially became Madam Lan. Qinghengjun officially ended his seclusion within the sect.

In between all of these, Lan Qiren tried his best to be there for Wei Ying. He did not allow him to stay in the nursery and instead, asked his things to be moved to his quarters. The room was ready for everything that Wei Ying needed, especially for a recovering child who had poor health, especially immune system because of what happened.

Lan Qiren remembered how Wei Wuxian survived the streets, the Burial Mounds twice, and more. Yet the fever that happened took away his memories, not just of his current self but his past. Lan Qiren often wondered what could have the four-year-old child done if he realized that he traveled back in time.

Somehow... Lan Qiren does not wish to know. He saw how Wei Wuxian was. Even if he has made peace with his past, he was still someone who would want to do things for the greater good. Lan Qiren would still aim for him to grow that way... but he would instill in him self-love and self-preservation. He would teach him of his self-worth. He will grow with love and attention. Not just him but his nephews too. He would not let them grow the way he raised them in the past.

Lan Qiren is not alone this time. He has his brother, sister-in-law who would help him raise the kids.

Perhaps, it was destiny that he came to Caiyi that day. It was destiny that it was him who found and saved him. He was not an active agent in his first life in the past, but he was there in his second life. That Lan Qiren kept his opinion of him even after they got married until Wei Wuxian wormed himself into his heart.

This time, Lan Qiren will make up for the mistakes and misjudgment of the other version of himself – of the Lan Qiren in Wei Wuxian's past. He'll do it for the child, for his parents, and to thank the child's memories made him try to prevent things from happening in their lives (*in his life* and Lan Qiren would accept if he'll be called selfish because he'll continue changing things for the better... especially for his family).

His sister-in-law actually asked why he did not adopt Wei Ying officially. He told them of his reason.

"Years were wasted for their pinning and other factors that included me. I won't allow it to take so long. Being related even just through adoption will make them have inhibitions and I do not want to watch them pin for so long. I spent so much time in A-Ying's memories watching him and A-Zhan do that. It was tiring."

Liu Meiyue laughed so hard while his brother huffed fondly as he shook his head.

He also had to explain to him why they could not come to the Gentian House and meet his shimu, Lan Zhan, and Huan-gege. It was during the time Liu Meiyue was getting treated as well as their quest for the Yin iron shards. It was good that he did not have a lot of questions at that time.

"Your shimu needs to do something very important. You need to be patient, A-Ying. If your shimu accomplishes her task successfully, then she could leave the Gentian House. You kept on asking if when can she go out, right?"

"Mn. Then Huan-gege and Lan Zhan?"

"They will need to be patient too. While you cannot meet them, I need you to focus on your studies and health so when Ji-daifu checks your health, she could hopefully allow you to join the other students and meet new friends. Do you want that?"

"Mn! A-Ying will work hard!"

"Not too hard."

"No, not too hard, shushu!"

"Good."

Lan Qiren tied Wei Ying's own ribbon around his forehead when he was finally allowed to join the students his age for the formal studies. The head healer and Lan Ji said his health has

improved a lot and could face other people without fearing for his immune system to fail him.

Wei Ying still received the ribbon with a silver cloud in the middle. He was his ward. He could still remember how Wei Wuxian carefully ties Wangji's ribbon on his wrist and how he cried when he handed him his forehead ribbon right after their official wedding.

"This ribbon represents us, members of Gusu-Lan and our restraint. Only parents, children, and spouse could touch it. As you grow older, you will understand the regulations that come with it. Take good care of it, A-Ying."

"I will shushu! A-Ying promise!"

Like in the past, little Wei Ying is already a genius at his age. He was a fast learner and active in seeking knowledge.

Lan Qiren taught him the rules and explained to him why they needed each one of them. Wei Ying had his questions and he tried answering them with the wisdom he could impart to a young child. Even if he huffed over his brother's decision to modify the rules, it also helped in making the child understand.

He realized that Wei Wuxian grew up in a place where there were no rules. Right from the streets up to Lotus Pier -- that punishments were given *just because* . He could still remember how he had to shoulder the punishments of the other disciples. There is no wonder that he continued breaking rules when he arrived in Cloud Recesses.

This time, Lan Qiren will make sure that he understands why there are rules and punishments. He would not receive unjust punishments like his past self.

"I copied lines today. I made noise in class." Wei Ying shyly said as he sat beside him. Lan Qiren put down the book he was reading.

"Oh? And why did you make noise?"

"I wanted to ask a question but instead of raising my hand, I said it out loud while Xue-shidi was reciting."

"Do you know what you did wrong?" Lan Qiren patiently waited as Wei Ying took out his book and brush.

"Mn. I disturb the class and distracted Xue-shidi. I said sorry."

"That is good. Was your question answered?"

"Mn. Hong-laoshi answered it. I just asked the difference between the imp and monsters."

"That was a good question, A-Ying."

The child beside him giggled and Lan Qiren noticed his crooked forehead ribbon. He carefully reached out to fix it. Wei Ying moved forward and leaned to his touch. Qiren felt warmth in his heart.

“How was copying the lines?”

“I messed up a few characters. Huan-gege came to check on me and Lan Zhan since he came with me. He corrected them, look.” He opened the book and pointed at the lines. Qiren nodded approvingly.

“Your calligraphy is improving, A-Ying. Very good,” he patted his head.

“Thank you shushu! Lan Zhan and Huan-gege said that too! I want to have pretty handwriting like shushu!”

Lan Qiren huffed as he shook his head.

“You will do well, it will take time.”

“Shushu took time?”

“Yes. I had to practice a lot and watch over the corrections they taught me so I could improve.”

“Mn! I would do that too!”

“Good. And come to me or your teacher if you need help.”

“Okay, shushu.”

“Should we start?”

“Mn!”

Lan Qiren took out another book to begin his personal lesson with his precious ward.

Lan Qiren felt satisfied to see Wei Ying healthy and happy. He did not need to fight dogs and other kids (and adults) for food, look for sheds to shelter himself from the weather and deal with Jiang Fengmian’s family. He heard that he was looking for the child but after discussing it with his brother and sister-in-law, they agreed that it was better not to inform him.

“If he comes over and asks for A-Ying, it will be hard to hold him back if Jiang-zongzhu uses his sworn brotherhood with Wei Changze. I only heard about what you saw in A-Ying’s memories and I do not wish for him to see Yu Ziyuan as early as this life.”

If there is another good thing that Yu Ziyuan has done aside from bringing Wei Ying to Gusu, it must be her timing of finding him in that alley as early as the time when he was kicked out of the inn. Wei Ying did not get to fight dogs that caused his severe fear of the animals. He could still remember how Wei Wuxian ran away and clung to his nephew at the sight of Jin Rulan's dog.

And of course, he could still remember how his heart almost dropped when he heard the dogs barking and little A-Ying suddenly ran away while pulling his nephews. He hurriedly followed them as he thought that he was afraid... only to end up finding them petting the dogs and they asked him if they could buy treats to give to the dogs. He carefully watched as little A-Ying petted the dog and when he did not find any traces of fear on his face, Qiren released the breath he was holding.

He nourished Wei Ying and he felt satisfied seeing his full and red cheeks, his healthy body, and height. He used to be lanky and close to being a malnourished boy before. This time, he is eating the right kind and enough food. His brother has modified the rules about eating and the food served. There are special days where meat from Caiyi is served and it will be the disciple's choice if he eats it or not. Of course, the younger ones indulged themselves with it.

Lan Qiren does not even want to start with how Wei Wuxian ate all those spices before. His eyes watered with just the sight of it.

It all began when he started eating enough food in Lotus Pier. The South is abundant with spices. He was afraid that one day, they would stop giving him food especially when he does badly in training and lessons even if he has been trying his best to catch up with the Jiang disciples. Wei Wuxian figured that if he covered his food with spices, especially chili, no one would take away his food like the dogs and other stray kids did while he was in the streets. No one got concerned with that and Lan Qiren watched him writhe with abdominal pain until one day, he just got used to it.

He could recall how Wen Qing, the female Wen doctor, admonished him with how damaged his digestive organs are especially when he did not have his core to balance and help cure them.

Lan Qiren still introduced him to spices and chili. He eats them moderately but often grimaces when it gets *too* spicy. The Wei Wuxian than he saw would just munch everything in his mouth without actually caring about the taste (he just knows that it is spicy and it means it is delicious for his taste palette) as long as his stomach is full.

Lan Qiren actually found it adorable how full and healthy the cheeks of Wei Ying, and his nephews are. Lan Zhan's cheeks are the fullest of the three and always gets attacked by his mother's fond teasing and pinch that would make his ears blush.

One thing that Lan Qiren made sure of was to make everyone, especially Wei Ying know that there is no competition between them as everything is a process of learning. Some learn fast,

some learn moderately while others need focused teachings to learn things. One gets praised when they do well, one gets help when they need it. The presence of the Madam of the Sect is a huge help with this aspect.

While looking at Wei Wuxian's memories, Lan Qiren made sure not to compare them, especially the three. Lan Qiren had to wince and almost cover his ears each time Yu Ziyuan compared her son with Wei Wuxian and the child had to hold himself back a lot of times. He watched how Wei Wuxian tried to downgrade himself for Jiang Wanyin and Lan Qiren would do everything for that not to happen again.

And he is glad that he does not need to do anything. Since Xichen is older, he is someone that the two look up to. He has set a good example for them. Lan Zhan and Wei Ying are equal. They have differences but those differences fulfill what the other lacks and that makes everything fit into place between them. They do not compete, they improve together. They do not need to compare themselves because they both have things they excel in. Liu Meiyue is one of the many people who makes sure that everyone knows that.

Lan Qiren knows the difference is truly huge and his sister-in-law is incomparable especially against Yu Ziyuan (and it is forbidden) but he could not help to do it deep inside. Liu Meiyue is everything Gusu-Lan needs for a furen. He then recalled how Yu Ziyuan was in Lotus Pier and Lan Qiren could only shake his head. He does not even spare her a thought aside from the hopes *things could have changed in Lotus Pier* now that Wei Changze and Cangse Sanren's child is not with them.

One thing that Lan Qiren did not expect was Nie Yongwu surviving just because Lan Xichen met Nie Mingjue in a hunt (and he knew that it started from there. This time, he would make sure that his nephew does not get a chance to cry himself to sleep for losing the person who holds his heart. He told his brother and sister-in-law this. They were determined to help Xichen this time) and he told the other two. A-Ying asked to see sabers, it caught A-Zhan's interest as well.

When his brother returned and he learned about what happened, he did not know why he felt so relieved. The Nie Sect Leader is alive, Nie Mingjue gets to continue experiencing his youth (and develop a friendship with his nephew), and Nie Huasiang whom he knew... orchestrated Wei Wuxian's return would get to experience life with his father and a new mother figure.

He talked to his brother about the qi deviation history of the Nie Sect. He watched Wei Wuxian and Nie Huasang discuss it several times but Nie Huasang has figured a way to solve it, Wei Wuxian respected the sect's secrecy and did not pry. He only helped ward the Stone Castle to contain the resentful energy and not allow outsiders even to try to penetrate them.

Nie Yongwu told them when they offered help, especially when they felt the effect of Song of Clarity after his brother played it for them.

It was a curse. The sixth Nie Sect Leader greatly offended a centuries-old creature by killing its off-springs. The creature cursed the main bloodline of the Nie clan. The curse focused on their qi and the way they cultivated their sabers.

Lan Qiren does not know how Nie Huaisang resolved it but Gusu-Lan has musical cultivation, they could help.

Liu Meiyue figured it out. Truly, his sister-in-law is truly skilled at a lot of things. It was a long process but everyone was determined. They did it behind the children's backs.

They had to offer to play clarity and their cold spring until it was resolved. It took years but they did it.

When everything was over and the great Nie Sect Leader had finished weeping at the thought that he'll live longer than 40 years old, the stone castle was destroyed without a back clash. The sabers were moved to the main ancestral hall.

The qi of the main bloodline of the Nie clan still needed to be monitored. They could not change the beast living in their sabers but Nie Yongwu with the help of Nie Mingyu has developed a new way to cultivate their sabers for the next generation (Qiren thinks of his grandchild that Mingjue and Xichen will eventually have and he thinks that everything they did was worth it).

Wei Ying was affectionate as a child and even as he grew up. Lan Qiren grew up with rules about propriety and his brother modified these rules. They could now show emotions both through words and actions and not act repressed all the time. Wei Ying liked it. He would often hold his hand when they walked, he would hug him, and when he was younger, he would even ask for a kiss on his forehead and Lan Qiren indulged him with this and he sees his brother and sister-in-law do it to their sons too.

He does not know if he did it to the past versions of little A-Huan and little A-Zhan but he definitely never did it in the present time before he found Wei Ying because of the rules except for holding their hands to guide them. He patted their heads now, he returned their affections and Lan Qiren was surprised that he liked it.

When the naming and sword giving ceremony came, he still gave him the courtesy name Wuxian, Qiren liked its meaning (though Wei Ying insisted for them to call him A-Ying except for Xichen who should call him A-Xian instead. *"Shushu is the first one to call me A-Ying. I am thankful for my courtesy name he gave but I would prefer for shushu to call me A-Ying even just in private."*)

He recalled one memory between Jiang Fengmian and Wei Ying. He explained that when he went to have his and Jiang Cheng's swords forged for their ceremony, the swordsmith said that Wei Changze commissioned him to create a sword for his future child if his child becomes a cultivator.

Lan Qiren went to Yunmeng and tried to find the swordsmith. He informed him about Wei Changze's son.

“Aiyah! Wei Changze really did it huh? A son who became a cultivator. I still kept the design he wished for his child's sword. I could have it ready in a week.”

Perhaps, some things will never change as when Wei Ying told him to name it *whatever* – *whatever* he likes... Lan Qiren had *Suibian* engraved on its scabbard. It just fits him so much.

After receiving his courtesy name, Qiren just smiled when Wei Ying named his dizi Chenqing. It does not look like the ghost flute. It was made in Gusu by the same one who created Liebing, Xichen's xiao. It has a beautiful light blue colored dizi with red highlights to pair with his sword's design.

When he first learned that little A-Ying wanted to learn musical cultivation through a flute like his Huan-gege but with a dizi instead of a xiao, Qiren took a deep breath to center himself and immediately approved it. Again, some things will never change yet this time, Wei Ying will not practice demonic cultivation because it would not be his last option. Qiren will make sure of that. Besides, he is such a gifted dizi player.

Lan Qiren watched them grow up in front of his eyes like how he watched the past Wei Wuxian grow up. This time, he grew up differently – full of love, happiness, and worth. Lan Qiren was satisfied, he always prayed for Wei Changze and Cangse Sanren's approval and happiness if they ever see their son now.

Of course, he also watched them fall in love. Nie Mingjue and Lan Xichen, Lan Wangji and Wei Wuxian. It was infuriating but he had to be patient. Lan Qiren knew to himself that he would do anything for them not to suffer a lost love and grief. He would make sure of that.

They have made arrangements with the Nies and they have prepared Xichen and Wangji. They will make it work.

Through the years, he heard about the Jiangs of course, but he tried his best to ignore the stories.

Not until A-Ying came home from Qishan and told him of the conversation that transpired between him and Jiang Fengmian. Qiren felt anger rise on his throat but he held it back and focused on A-Ying instead.

The child was afraid that Jiang Fengmian would talk to them and they would agree for him to go to Lotus Pier. He did not want to leave and so Lan Qiren gave him the assurance he needed.

“I would never allow anyone to take you away from here, A-Ying... not unless you leave on your own then I will support you on your decision.”

Lan Qiren should have expected that Jiang Wanyin would probably grow up the same way he did in the past. The only difference is that he got worse, especially without having someone like Wei Wuxian to be his sword and shield (and a stress and anger absorber if needed). He does not want to feel pity but he gives sympathy to Jiang Yanli... for not having someone like Wei Wuxian who would jump headfirst to make her smile, to protect her against anyone, and actually stand for her. Though Qiren thinks that this Jiang Yanli is physically stronger than the Yanli he saw in the past.

Jiang Wanyin's actions reflect so much of his mother that Lan Qiren wondered how things went in Lotus Pier now that Wei Ying did not grow up there. *Bad*. That is the only thing that entered his mind.

The waterborne abyss still happened but because he had warned his brother about it and Liu Meiyue loves inventing talismans and arrays as much as Wei Ying does, they were able to put wards around Gusu. The waterborne abyss was pushed back to Qishan and no one from Gusu had to deal with it.

But Qiren remembered someone though. As much as Xue Yang, now courtesy name Chengmei thrives as a Gusu-Lan disciple and a very good shidi to his nephews and Wei Ying, Su Minshan remained the same. He entered Gusu as an outer disciple when he was 13. Lan Qiren immediately recalled everything that he did in Wei Ying's memories. He tried to observe but the first time he saw the contempt on his expression that was directed to his nephews and Wei Ying, Qiren had to do something.

Yet he did not have to do much. It was his brother who caught Su Minshan trying to sneak in alcohol in the junior disciples' dorm and put it inside Wei Ying and Xue Yang's room. Punishment was just supposed to be discipline paddle... but when his things were checked for inspection (something they did not have in the past but his sister-in-law suggested this because some may think they became lenient as the number of rules decreased) they found cheats he used during examinations and he was too nervous to deny it.

He was subject to expulsion.

The last thing that Qiren heard, Su Minshan's parents pushed him on becoming a monk.

As time passed and Lan Qiren watched Wei Ying grow and fall in love with his nephew who is equally besotted as he saw him in Wei Ying's memories, Qiren knew he had to do something to ensure this situation stays the same.

And so they need to deal with the biggest issue now.

They cannot destroy the yin iron shards with spiritual energy alone. He saw them fail when they tried. There had to be a *balance*. He saw Wei Wuxian had to use resentful energy. The

Yin and Yang energy had to be strong and balanced.

“Spiritual energy is energy. Resentful energy is energy.”

Lan Qiren does not know anyone who could do it but it definitely must not be Wei Ying.

He had his qin, he was also skilled with xiao. Qiren has a little memory of his own parents. Their mother died when he was three due to weak health. Their father died on a night hunt where he joined him and his brother. He died protecting them and that made their uncle take over the leadership until his brother was ready.

“Fuqin! Fuqin! Why did you do it?! Why?! Hold on please, help is coming! Please!”

“A-Jun... A-Ren... rem – remember – remember this... a parent... a parent would—“

“Fuqin!”

“A parent... would do anything... everything for their child. Live well, my sons.”

It all started when he went on a solo night hunt. He still goes on night hunt and it is usually with his brother or with his nephews... most of the time it was with Wei Ying until he and *his Lan Zhan* preferred to go on night hunts alone like his Huan-gege and da-ge.

He did it with full concentration and a clear mind. It was just a few test notes but he felt it immediately. He felt how strong it was. Qiren had to play clarity for himself several times, cold sweat enveloped his body until he was able to return to Cloud Recesses and soak in the cold spring.

“Xiongzhong... if one day – If one day I do something foolish, I will confess it to you and please give me the punishment appropriate for my transgression.”

“A-Ren, what are you talking about?”

“Perhaps... 300 strikes of the disciple ruler.”

“A-REN! What are you-“

“I will forever engrave the sight of Wangji’s back in my mind. You will say that I am young right now and I am talking foolishly but I might do something more foolish. I hope for xiongzhang to understand and I hope for xiongzhang to punish me as he deems fit.”

“You are talking riddles but I feel like I have an idea of what you are talking about. A-Ren, please.”

“I’ll go attend on my duties now, xiongzhang.”

The first time he was able to manipulate resentful energy and raise a corpse as he recalled the songs that Wei Wuxian played, Lan Qiren felt goosebumps all over his body.

He finally understood it now. The whispers that came with the power of the resentful energy. He had a core to cleanse himself, he had the song of clarity, both of which Wei Wuxian did not have when he founded it.

He could also feel it, the *power* -- the *endless power and possibilities* that the resentful energy could give. Lan Qiren does not wonder why a lot of people coveted the skills of manipulating it.

He knew that his brother and sister-in-law must have known it but he did not tell them yet.

He became even more determined when Lan Zhan and Wei Ying returned from a hunt with a disciple that turned into a puppet. Lan Qiren knew things were going to happen fast from here. If Wen Rouhan had one shard and could do this, what else if he had the rest? Lan Qiren would not allow that.

The arrival of Wen Qing and Wen Qionglin to "join" the lectures reminded him of the past. They were sent there to look for Gusu-Lan's shard.

What Yu Ziyuan did woke both of his spiritual energy and the resentful energy that he had cultivated. He was already a strong cultivator and having the resentful energy was able to make him pull Zidian from its master. As far as he knew, no one could take it away from its master but he did. He wanted to do more but he kept on centering himself, not wanting to lash out when he knew that there was a better way to make them pay for their actions.

His brother was still considerate with his decision but Lan Qiren accepted it. He does not know what should happen to Yu Ziyuan for him to be satisfied after how she treated Wei Ying in the past and now, so his brother’s condition was enough. She loved to save face, perhaps, making it in public could have been better. Qiren knows that such thoughts are forbidden but he’s a human too.

But Lan Qiren would rather focus on Wei Ying. He spent his entire life not seeing Zidian and then one moment, he was about to be whipped by it if Qiren was not fast enough. Both Wei Ying and his nephew were stunned when Yu Ziyuan did that. Perhaps, Wangji could have recovered fast to deflect that and protect Wei Ying but Qiren moved first.

Growing up, Qiren made sure to tell Wei Ying stories about his parents. His brother and sister-in-law were able to meet them on random occasions before so they had their own stories to share. The portraits were well preserved too.

Yet this time, he finally talked to him about Jiang Fengmian and Yu Ziyuan's involvement in his parents' life.

He also told him of the conditions his brother gave the Yunmeng-Jiang Sect. Qiren welcomed him in his embrace when everything was over. He let him cry and vent out his frustrations, bad mouth Jiang Wanyin, talk about his feelings towards Jiang Yanli's actions for her brother, and more.

His sister-in-law came to bring them food and give Wei Ying a warm and motherly hug.

"I'd burn the world to protect you, A-Huan, and A-Zhan. Your Shifu and shushu would do it with me. She would not get a chance to get close to you anymore. I promise you that."

When the lectures ended and Wangji formally asked to start a courtship with Wei Ying, Qiren knew they had to do things faster. It was not just because of them but because Qishan-Wen will make their move soon.

When he finally had a better grasp of how to *properly* manipulate resentful energy, he told his brother and sister-in-law that it was time to destroy the shards. He taught his brother the song.

They decided to do it one at a time. They brought the first shard to a clearing like how Wangji, Wuxian, and Sizhui did in the past. He trusts that his brother's spiritual energy was enough.

The moment they started to play, his brother almost stopped when he realized what he was doing. Instead of blue spiritual energy, green resentful energy rose the moment Qiren began to play. He focused like how he practiced before. He did not hear anything around him aside from the music.

He saw the shard rattle and how it began to emit smoke as it reacted to the song. He saw it burst and turn into dust. Qiren heard his name being called and he knew no more.

When he woke up, he heard the Song of Clarity being played. His brother and sister-in-law were there. They were inside an inn.

"Thank you for not bringing me back to Cloud Recesses."

"A-Ren!"

“We have three shards and a sword left.”

“A-Ren, is this the foolish thing you were talking about?!”

“Xiongzhang does not need to ask the thing that he already knows.”

“A-Ren!”

“It affects the mind and the body, temperament even more. There is a price to pay with what I am doing and I am willing to pay. This must be destroyed. No one will do it aside from me. Trust me on this.”

Despite the protests of his brother and sister-in-law, Qiren stood his ground as it was their only way to destroy the Yin Iron. Their predecessors have tried and failed while here is Qiren who learned it from seeing through Wei Ying's memories. It will take a lot of time, decades, a century even before they could come up with a way to destroy it if they do not do it now. By that time, it may be too late already.

They destroyed one shard per week even if his sister-in-law insisted that they could try longer intervals. The three of them knew they were working with a limited time. They did not really tell their children what they were doing. He always passed out after and would wake with his brother playing the Song of Clarity. His sister-in-law would be there with an understanding look on her face and would offer him food to eat.

Even if he saw himself in Wei Wuxian's memory, this Lan Qiren, the present him cannot imagine a life without them.

Finally, they only needed the shard with Wen Rouhan and the sword inside the Xuanwu.

Yet they had to focus on the present first.

Qiren only knew about the attack of Cloud Recesses in Wei Wuxian's memories so he did not know when but they were ready, very much ready and they had Wen Qionglin to thank for the warning too. Qiren could still remember memories of him with Wei Wuxian and he is glad that they still became friends.

They knew that Qishan-Wen tried to attack parts of Gusu but they could barely do anything because of their wards around the borders. They sent missives as warnings to the sects, even Yunmeng-Jiang. Qiren could still remember the devastation and everything that happened after its fall. Qiren does not wish to see it happen.

Yet it did.

His focus was on Wen Rouhan killing the Xuanwu and that the Sect Leader probably had the sword when he learned about the attack. He knew about how Qinghe-Nie survived the attack led by Wen Chao, he wondered why Yunmeng-Jiang did not.

He heard about Jiang Fengmian's death, the cores melted, and the attack of Meishan-Yu.

Qiren cannot help but shake his head. If Yu Ziyuan truly time-traveled like Wei Ying did and she thought that getting rid of the child would save her and her sect... then now, she probably knew that she was wrong.

However, what happened in Lotus Pier triggered a memory in Lan Qiren... something that he wished to deal with by himself. It must have woken the resentment inside him that he heard his inner-self... he heard a whisper telling him *to do it*. He has better control than this -- but the whispers... it kept on coming and he knew... he knew it was his inner desire speaking and so...

He found himself in Lotus Pier, wanting to kill the three persons who caused Wei Wuxian's already miserable life with Jiangs to become even more miserable.

He only planned to sneak and deliver a killing blow yet he ended up using demonic cultivation. He killed Wang Lingjiao first using a knife from his sleeves. He could remember how she asked for Wei Wuxian to be punished, how she used her brand to Wei Wuxian's already branded chest. Lan Qiren used the silencing spell on her but perhaps, she was not as foolish as he thought. She broke a jar when she fell and it caused some noise. Wen Chao entered and Lan Qiren used the silencing spell on him as well. He tried running away and Qiren could not reveal himself from his hiding spot and so he played. Wang Lingjiao's corpse rose and killed Wen Chao using the same knife that killed her.

When Wen Zhuliu arrived, he already raised Wen Chao's corpse to welcome him. Wen Zhuliu fought back but Qiren learned musical cultivation with spiritual energy first before demonic cultivation. He played an ancient song to keep Wen Zhuliu's body and spiritual energy still for a few seconds and then he instructed Wen Chao's corpse to kill him using the same knife and stab it straight to his lower dantian where his core resides. Wang Lingjiao's long nails pierced through his back.

Lan Qiren took his knife and left the scene without even revealing himself. He was in his white robes the whole time. He made sure to remove the silencing dome around the compound.

He does not know how Wang Lingjiao hanged herself. Perhaps, someone from the Wen army they were with woke up from the sleep-inducing music he played and did that to her. After all, he heard a lot of them gossip about their dislike towards *Wen-er-gongzi's woman*.

He did not tell his brother and sister-in-law about it. He played clarity for himself.

Wen Rouhan's death was a surprise for them.

It was Liu Meiyue who told them what happened after she was able to talk to Wen Yu.

The madam killed Wen Rouhan after she was imprisoned for trying to question him about what he was doing when she saw the puppets in his throne room. She escaped and found out he wanted to kill Wen Qionglin after he learned of his transgression. She used the Yin Iron

sword. It pierced through Wen Rouhan and it was followed by qi deviation that sealed his death.

Wen Yu asked for Liu Meiyue's help as she kept on hearing voices in her head. She had both the sword and the shard sealed in the throne room.

They helped her and asked for the shard and the sword.

"I know it is dangerous. I could feel it, that is why I had it sealed. If giving it to you will give me assurance that it will be destroyed, then I will hand it to you before you leave."

"You have my world, Wen-zongzhu."

"Thank you, Lan-furen."

Qiren and his brother sealed them and brought them back to the cold pond cave.

The sword took months before it finally got destroyed. Qiren felt the toll in his body but he tried his best to conceal it when they were back in Cloud Recesses.

"This is the last time you are using it, A-Ren. Enough. You have done enough."

"I know xiongzhang. You have my word."

He meditated in the cold spring, he listened to his brother play Song of Clarity, he attended to his duties, and he continued to be Wei Ying's shushu who would listen to his antics. He made sure to conceal what he was going through perfectly so Wei Ying would not notice anything and he is glad that he didn't.

"Shushu! Xue-shidi and I found a way to easily clear the path from snow during winter."

"You invented it?"

"Yes! We'll tell Shimu about it later but I wanted to tell you first. Xue-shidi is such a genius shidi! I showed him what I was working on and he figured out where I went wrong and how to make it work!"

He has not thought of Jin Guangshan yet but his death and Meng Yao's involvement honestly surprised him. He thought that Meng Yao was in a good place in Qinghe-Nie already. There are really some things that one cannot change.

But Qiren realized something. It was an early death. Mo Xuanyu has not been conceived yet. If he counted it right, he was born towards the end of the war.

Could it be that his soul was really shattered that he was not conceived and born in this timeline?

Still, Lan Qiren burned joss money for him and prayed for his soul. If his mother gets to still give birth to him in this world, he prays for him to have a better life... a life without Jin Guangshan as his father.

Lan Qiren has observed since Wei Ying was young. He tried to see if he remembers anything -- something... but it seems like the fever, despite how *deadly* it was... could still be considered a blessing in disguise. Wei Ying does not remember *anything* from the past. There are times he would *randomly* say things that had reference to the past like:

“Lan Zhan said he’ll take me back to Gusu after I drank and did not tell him but he still accompanied me to Lanling to meet Jin-xiong!”

“Single plank bridge? Aiyah, Xue-shidi, I just said that because of the song but I would never exchange what I have now!”

And of course, the idea and questions about resentful energy came but his sister-in-law was there to welcome and discuss the ideas with Wei Ying that made him understand compared to how everything was just a theory that became his last resort in his past life.

Yet as he grew older, Wei Ying never showed any signs that remember anything concrete -- anything about the *past* Wei Wuxian and truly, Lan Qiren is okay (and thankful) with that. He knows that if the past Lan Wangji -- his dearest nephew -- sees how *his* Wei Ying grew up as the person he is today, he would be very happy, not just for Wei Ying but for himself as well.

When he went to talk to Yu Ziyuan, he knew that the conversation would not turn out anywhere pleasant but he did not expect himself to say those words to her.

Yet he meant his parting words.

He hoped for her to live well. This is her second chance in life. She survived the attack. It was time for her to think things through. He wished both Jiang Yanli and Jiang Wanyin well. He hopes for Jiang Fengmian’s death not to go in vain.

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Lan Qiren could hear Wei Wuxian’s cry and he could hear disciples restraining him, perhaps not just him but Lan Wangji too.

Qiren just gripped his knuckles as the punishment was almost done. He opened his eyes to meet his brother’s eyes. He could see that he was close to tears. Qiren shook his head as he gritted his teeth. He could barely feel his lower body as he continued to kneel.

When the punishment ended, Lan Qiren could hardly stand up but he found his balance. He saw his blood on the ground as he picked up his robes and covered his back. He then focused on his brother.

He bowed his head to the zongzhu and furen who stood frozen in front of him.

The moment he turned around and the discipline committee parted a path for him to pass, Wei Wuxian and Wangji were released and they approached him immediately.

“Shushu! Shushu what happened?! Why?! Why?!” tears were streaming down on his face as he helped him walk.

“Silly child, why are you crying?”

“Shushu!”

Qiren turned to look at his nephew. Wangji could not conceal all the expressions and emotions he was feeling.

“Wangji, could you bring Ji-daifu to my quarters? I got the sect leader’s permission to have her help me after my punishment.”

It looked like Wangji did not want to leave but after looking at his back one more time, he nodded and immediately left.

He turned his head to look at Wei Wuxian.

“Do you remember the 50th rule?”

“Reject the crooked path but shushu! You are the most righteous person-“

The corners of Lan Qiren’s lips lifted as he shook his head with gritted teeth, the pain seeping through his bones. He cannot imagine how his nephew, barely an adult, survived this.

“What I did was wrong and I am taking my punishment. I asked xiongzhang and saozhi for punishment.”

“What did you do?”

“Something that you do not need to know.”

“But why?”

“I’ll tell you one day,” his knees buckled but Wei Wuxian was quick to pull him up.

“Shushu!”

“Take care of me, A-Ying?”

“Always, shushu! Always”

Later he'll tell him that he tried the crooked path.

But that was not the only reason.

He also wanted to punish himself for what his old self did: his mistakes, his blindness, his misjudgment -- everything. His back will form scars and people usually labels these scars as a mark of shame but Lan Qiren does not care.

This is his repentance.

And from here on, they'll move forward.

Later, his brother will fuss and take good care of him and would even say he regretted it but Qiren will laugh and ask him to apply salve on his back. His sister-in-law would frown but make sure that he was fed and would stay alive. Nainai would surely come, shake her head, laugh, and call him a fool.

He'll reject their spiritual energy and will only accept Lan Ji's medicine to ease the pain. He'll go to seclusion in the cold pond cave to recuperate fast and reflect on everything that happened since he found the fevered child.

He needs to heal and attend the wedding of Wangji and A-Ying. He'll receive their tea and bless their marriage and this time, he will have his brother and sister-in-law beside him.

Later, he'll hear more stories from A-Ying about how he met Xiao Xingchen and Song Lan whom he frequently meets now that they are currently staying in Gusu territory. They are with a child with white pupils but could clearly see. Her name is A-Qing and A-Ying told him that the two esteemed cultivators were considering adopting her.

Lan Qiren is happy to know that they both have their eyes intact and they are still making their name and reputation in the Cultivation World. Xue Yang is an accomplished Gusu-Lan disciple who is doted by his shixionsgs and shijies while he doted on his shidis and shimeis. He is known as 'Candy shixiong' by the kids as he brings candies everywhere. He'll give them some when they meet.

If one day these four people cross their paths, then Lan Qiren believes that it is their fate's doing.

But that is all for later.

For now, he'll listen to A-Ying and his nephew play a duet of healing songs for him.

Tomorrow, his elder nephew will come with his husband and they'll fuss over him too.

This is the family that they built all thanks to what Yu Ziyuan did. He does not thank her for what she did to the fevered child, but he thanks her for bringing him to Gusu which greatly

changed the course of things in their lives.

He wonders if Yu Ziyuan realized that.

Yu Ziyuan crossed her arms as she watched the disciples train under her son's leadership. She still corrects and commands them when she sees something wrong.

"Yu-furen, a messenger came with this letter," one of the disciples approached her and handed her the expensive-looking paper with a Gusu-Lan seal. She huffed as she dismissed the disciple.

She opened it and her brows furrowed upon reading it.

It was an announcement.

Betrothal between Lan Wangji and Wei Wuxian.

"That brat..."

She gritted her teeth as she crumpled the paper and threw it to the side, her lips pursed as she glared at nowhere.

"It was not just you, Yu Ziyuan."

Did Lan Qiren have visions of his alternate life too? Is it why he was able to save Wei Wuxian from Gusu? Is it why the people who were supposed to be dead are alive?

How about her husband then?

The thought of Jiang Fengmian's death made her grip her knuckles. He pushed their son in her direction who just had her core melted. She could still hear his shout, the first time he shouted a command to her.

“GO!”

And they were pulled to the docks and pushed to the boat. She saw how Wen Zhuliu’s hand touched Jiang Fengmian’s lower dantian and melted his core, she saw how his sword pierced through Jiang Fengmian’s chest. He saw Jiang Fengmian still deliver a blow to Wen Zhuliu’s gut before he fell. Wen Zhuliu still survived that attack while her husband died.

They did not find his body when they returned to Lotus Pier because Wen Chao burned the bodies of everyone they killed.

Until now, no one knows who orchestrated the death of Wen Chao, Wen Zhuliu, and Wang Lingjiao. The current Wen-zongzhu – Wen Yu did not want to conduct an investigation anymore. She just retrieved the bodies for proper burial.

Yu Ziyuan resents the world.

Her sworn sister who helped them when they went to Lanling for refuge was not able to reinstate the betrothal between her daughter and Jin Zixuan. Meishan-Yu was greatly attacked and some of her sisters were gravely injured. Her son’s core was half-melted, damaged and so he could barely do things to the maximum. Yanli still has her core but the injury on her right hand almost resulted in amputation. Her hand was saved but it would spasm when used for a long time.

She could remember her visions of her alternate life.

That bitch , Wang Lingjiao asked her to cut the brat’s sword hand. Yet now, it is her daughter who could not use her sword hand anymore. Yanli even had to learn how to hold the brush using her left hand. It is just now that Yu Ziyuan realized that her daughter has beautiful calligraphy. Now, she was learning how to write again.

She could remember Lan Qiren’s words.

“Your son lost his core and Wei Wuxian gave him his.”

Yu Ziyuan does not even know if that is even possible. She wanted to accuse Lan Qiren of lying but she knows that Lan Qiren would rather cut his tongue than lie, that pedantic man.

“Your daughter married Jin Zixuan. You have a grandson named Jin Ling, courtesy name Rulan.”

If what he was saying is true, then it won't be happening now. Yanli is unfortunately betrothed to Sect Leader Ouyang's brother. It was mainly for an alliance with Baling.

Yu Ziyuan felt like her blood was rising to her head each time she recalled the words in the conversation she had with Lan Qiren.

His words... he spoke them with so much conviction as if he saw it happen in front of his eyes like how Yu Ziyuan felt after she woke up a day after her son's birth. All the visions she saw felt so real.

“Wei Wuxian lived a happy life with my nephew and their son and he'll probably live a much better and happier life now... without fighting a war; without losing his core, and without having to grow up under someone like you.”

Yu Ziyuan began to tremble as rage started to build up inside her.

“Your son became the sect leader and he wielded Zidian. Your son brought your sect up from the ashes.”

If Yu Ziyuan looked around, she would only feel great disappointment. Zidian could no longer serve a master, it was buried somewhere and will never be used anymore. Her son could barely fly on his sword. Lotus Pier may be rebuilt with the help of Qishan-Wen led by Wen Yu but it will never be the same again.

She shut her eyes close only to see the face of the brat in his black and red robes because she never allowed him to wear any of their sect colors. She could hear his annoying laughter in his head, she could imagine him running around with his sword, and doing all the useless things he does best.

As she swallowed hard, feeling pain on her palm with how tight she was gripping her fists, Yu Ziyuan saw the face of the brat in his Gusu-Lan robes with the main clan's ribbon on his forehead.

Lan Qiren's prized ward.

Third Jade of Lan.

Fourth among the Young Masters.

And just recently, earned his title together with Lan Wangji. The light bearer and his light source. *Hanguangjun* and *Guangyuanjun*.

Him?! The light source? *Guangyuanjun*?! How could a brat become a light source?! He is a brat! A son of a servant and he does not deserve to receive any titles!

Yu Ziyuan could feel blood dripping to the ground from her palms.

She recalled the words in the letter she just read. *Betrothal*... which means... in the future, he will be leading the Lan Sect with Lan Wangji once Qinghengjun abdicates the position.

“NO!”

“...-niang! A-niang!”

Yu Ziyuan opened her eyes and she was seeing red. Beside her was her son. She saw Sandu in his hand and she grabbed it from him.

“A-niang! What are you-“

“NO! NO! THAT BRAT – NO!”

Yu Ziyuan ran towards the training field and started slashing on the dummies using Sandu as she held it with both hands.

The disciples scampered away in fear.

“A-niang stop! A-niang what are you-“

“NO! IT CANNOT BE! HE CANNOT BE BETTER THAN ME! HE CANNOT! I MADE SURE OF IT! HE CANNOT! HE SHOULD HAVE DIED! I SHOULD HAVE KILLED

HIM!”

She was thrashing around, thrusting and striking Sandu in all directions. She does not stop screaming.

About the son of a servant.

About the brat.

About the child who brings trouble wherever he goes.

About the urchin who should have died.

About the --

Yu Ziyuan felt a strong hit on her nape... the same thing she did to the child in Yiling all those years ago.

“You gave him a favor when you brought him to Gusu.”

And everything turned black.

“Did you hear? They said that Yu Ziyuan lost her mind!”

“I know! I heard it too! She lost her wits! Deserve if you ask me.”

“I saw it! I saw it! She was screaming – shouting about a brat and how she should have killed him. I was there to deliver crops for their kitchen. It was so scary!”

“It was like she was possessed and her son and daughter could barely do anything.”

“I heard that some parents pulled out their children from Yunmeng-Jiang after what happened. They were afraid that Yu Ziyuan does it again and hit their children instead of the dummies.”

“Well, if all these tragedies happened to me, I would have lost my mind too. Imagine losing everything in a blink of an eye? From Zidian to her core, to her husband, even her natal sect barely survived that Wen attack. Yunmeng-Jiang is obviously trying to rise again but well...”

“From everything I heard about Yu Ziyuan all these years, I think this is karma. Jiang Fengmian’s death must be his rest from how his wife treated him before.”

“Oh, how the mighty has fallen.”

“But who do you think is that brat she was talking about?”

“Who knows? No one is good enough in her eyes. Everyone’s a brat and useless except for her children.”

“Tsk tsk.”

The wedding of Lan Wangji and Wei Wuxian – Hanguangjun and Guangyuanjun – the Light-bearer and his Light Source was the talk of the Cultivation World.

Yunmeng-Jiang is still banned from coming to Cloud Recesses. An invitation arrived and was addressed to the Sect Leader only.

“DAMN CUT SLEEVES!”

Jiang Wanyin’s scream made the messenger scurry away... but not without starting the gossip about how the Jiang Sect Leader reacted with the wedding invitation.

The Yunmeng-Jiang Sect Leader did not show up at the wedding.

While a huge celebration was happening in Gusu, there was a big incident that happened in Yunmeng.

Yu Ziyuan who was starting to lose her grasp of reality was announced to have gone missing from Lotus Pier.

She was walking aimlessly and lost in trance. She was found in an alley in Yiling just beside one of Yiling’s inn that used to be close to bankruptcy but in a blink of an eye, they began thriving.

“A-niang,” Jiang Wanyin had tears in his eyes as he removed the grime on his mother’s face after he wrapped a cloak around her body. She was missing for two weeks even if Jiang Wanyin had deployed the entire Yunmeng-Jiang disciples to look for her.

“It was here,” she said, eyes lost but had a glint of fury. “I should have killed him where he stood. Here!” she pointed her finger at the spot where her son was standing. “Mercy?! I should have not given him mercy!”

“A-niang, let’s go home.”

“No. I need to-“

“A-niang, please do not let me do this again.”

“NO! Zidian?! Where is Zidian?! I need to – I need to -“

And for the nth time, Jiang Wanyin locked his mother's acupoints on her neck that rendered her unconscious. He carried him in his arms.

"Find a carriage. We are going home," he instructed one of his disciples.

These lines are all too familiar to Jiang Wanyin by now. Ever since the scene his mother caused in their training grounds where a lot of people witnessed it: disciples, servants, merchants, carpenters, and even passers-by... his mother seemed to have detached herself from reality.

She began talking to herself. She kept on cursing about a brat and how she should have killed him. Jiang Wanyin had to say that she was unwell during his sister's wedding. She was not able to receive their bows and tea.

When his sister got pregnant and came to Lotus Pier to visit, his mother pushed her away and said that she did not want a grandchild that is not named Jin Rulan. They do not even know where she got the name but they know that she must still be thinking about the broken engagement.

Jin Zixuan already announced his marriage with Nie Ningning and his sister is now married to Ouyang Chen, Sect Leader Ouyang's brother. His sister went through so much stress that day that she was advised not to come over to Lotus Pier as she almost lost the baby.

Now, Jiang Wanyin is left to take good care of their mother while he tries to make both ends meet as he runs the sect.

Jiang Wanyin does not know the reasons behind his mother's words.

She sometimes talks about visions.

About alternate life.

About her not being alone.

She even mentioned Lan Qiren and he does not know why.

Though Jiang Wanyin knew one thing.

The brat that his mother hoped to kill is none other than Wei Wuxian.

It just developed his hatred towards the man even more.

He is the reason why his mother became like this.

"One day, I'll see you again Wei Wuxian and you'll see... you'll see and feel what revenge of a Jiang is like. You'll see."

Will Jiang Wanyin ever have the chance to do such *revenge* he is talking about? Only time could tell.

Lan Qiren walked out of the Lanshi after his class. It has been a year since the wedding and his brother is still the Sect Leader. Wei Wuxian and Wangji are busy traveling, enjoying the world *while they still can* . Liu Meiyue has the same parting line to the couple each time she walks them out when they leave Cloud Recesses for their travel.

“Once we retire, it is your turn to run the sect, and my laogong and I will go and travel! You’ll send us communication talismans non-stop just to see our shadows. You’ll see!”

A lot of things happened after he received his punishment. One thing is for sure, he did not spend three years in seclusion like his nephew did in the past. He only did it to recuperate and he had a wedding to prepare... although Nie Huaisang was too excited to lead them on what to do. He and Liu Meiyue have done it after all.

He even had Madam Ni Chang’s troupe perform a script made by Qian Siuyou. Wei Wuxian cried his heart out to finally watch them live. Madam Ni Chang also gave him a special letter from Qian Siuyou for his special fan.

“He said in the letter that he was interested in our love story and I could send him a letter back. He would consider making a script or other literary work about us! He even said that perhaps, one day, he and his bounty hunter could meet Hanguangjun and Guangyuanjun! Isn’t that great?!”

Lan Qiren cannot help but smile thinking about the beautiful title that Wei Wuxian received from the people. It was simply fitting for the two of them. The light bearer and his light source. The light source and his light bearer. It is beautiful.

No one would ever hear about the Yiling Patriarch, no one even know who that is. Yiling is still the same, Burial Mounds is still there but Sect Leader Wen proposed a joint project to cleanse it since its location falls between the territory of Qishan and Yunmeng.

They do not have a Chief Cultivator anymore. It was abolished as rumors even came out that the position was cursed. Wen Rouhan died. Jin Guangshan who was next-in-line died. They would just host discussion conferences quarterly. It was taxing but it was working for everyone. All sects get to host it and not just the great sects. Minor sects get to exhibit what is best in their sect and territory. It helped their trade and economy too.

Lan Qiren does not dwell on this though. He is a teacher and not a sect leader. He'll leave that to his brother.

He does not leave Cloud Recesses unless needed and he does not feel any flicker of resentful energy inside him anymore. He does not regret what he did, he already paid for it too.

Lan Qiren also heard things. News travels fast and even if gossip is forbidden, people just cannot stop talking.

He heard about what happened to Yu Ziyuan. He asked him to live well, the words were said with the same intention. He did not expect this turn of events.

Lan Qiren heard that this must be her karma. He does not say anything.

“Lan-laoshi, Hanguangjun and Guangyuanjun are back. They have entered the first layer of the wards,” one of the patrols said.

Lan Qiren found himself smiling. It has been six weeks since the two left.

“I'll wait for them at the entrance arc,” he replied.

He patiently waited and was surprised when Wei Wuxian was cradling something in his arms while Wangji was holding a basket.

“Shushu!” Wei Wuxian exclaimed and then he winced when whatever he was cradling squirmed.

“Shufu,” his nephew greeted in a more sedate way.

“Wangji, A-Ying... what...”

Wei Wuxian moved closer and Qiren felt his breathing hitch.

A baby.

Just one look and he knows who it is. He will never go wrong with that cute buttoned nose and puffy cheeks. He knew he would look like this as a baby.

“How-“ he looked at the two and then he returned his eyes to look at the baby.

“We passed by Qishan before coming home as we were supposed to visit Wen-xiong, Wen-guniang and meet up with Nie-xiong in Nightless City but... a devastating landslide happened in Dafan. We went to help,” Wei Wuxian pursed his lips as he looked at the baby who was busy munching on the ends of his ribbon.

Qiren glanced at his nephew who was looking at his husband and their child softly. He felt warmth in his heart.

“This is Lan Xun-xiong’s baby. He and his wife... they... they both died in the landslide and they – they left the baby inside the Dancing Fairy’s cave... the basket –“ Wei Wuxian glanced at the basket on Wangji’s hand. “It was hanging on one of the arms of the statue, shushu! Lan Zhan went there to check if anyone was stuck or was hiding there and he called for me when he found him!”

Qiren watched as Wei Wuxian pulled the baby closer to his arms.

“His grandmother, Wen Jian’s mother died as well. Survivors recognized the baby but because there were a lot of people, children even... who were affected by the landslide, they will have no choice but to bring the baby to the orphanage with the rest of the children though Wen-xiong and Wen-guniang were trying to find families to keep them,” Wei Wuxian pouted.

“I know that Lan Zhan and I talked about adopting and this may be too early but... we just got too attached to this little one. He cried when someone from the orphanage took him away from Lan Zhan and I... and I just – we just... we just couldn’t leave him there, shushu.”

“We asked if we could adopt him and Wen-zongzhu agreed. Lan Xun-xiong’s family must be informed of what happened too,” Wangji supplied.

Lan Qiren nodded in understanding.

In the past, they never knew where A-Yuan came from but the child was a Lan as much as he was a Wen and a Wei the moment he was brought by Wangji in Cloud Recesses. Who would have thought that he was a son of a member of the Lan clan too? Lan Xun is one of their disciples who married out of Gusu. In the past, with all the deaths that happened during the war, Lan Qiren could only guess what happened to him if his son and wife (or only his son) ended up in the prison camp.

But that will not happen now.

A-Yuan will live in Cloud Recesses once more but now, he was brought in as a baby and not a three-year-old fevered child according to Wangji’s story to Wei Wuxian.

He'll grow up under his parents' care. Some things truly remain the same. He'll get Wangji's sense of rules, calm, and ways. He'll get Wuxian's charm, intelligence, and warmth. It will be a perfect combination and Lan Qiren is looking forward to seeing it.

He heard that Lan Gan who will become Lan Jingyi was born with Lan Weimin and Lan Xiang as his parents still. Jin Ling was born to Jin Zixuan and Nie Ningning. To his surprise, the name of Jiang Yanli's son with Ouyang Chen was named Ouyang Zizhen. He is not sure if it is the same Zizhen but according to the stories of Ouyang Lian in the past, his mother kept on giving birth to girls. It would not be a surprise if Sect Leader Ouyang actually adopted his brother's son and named him his heir.

Their births happened not in the same order as before. The older ones became younger while the younger ones were born first.

He will need to add to the list, Nie Xuanyu, the baby that Nie Mingjue and Lan Xichen adopted from birth and has recently turned one. Is the name coincidence or is it the same Xuanyu? Lan Qiren could only guess.

Though that does not really matter as of now, Qiren just looks forward to how the future will unfold, and of course, he looks forward to having them as his students once they grow up.

"His name is A-Yuan but we never got to know the characters though."

"The characters for to hope for." He replied.

The two looked surprised.

"That's beautiful, shushu."

"Mn. Thank you, shufu."

"Tell your father that you have your heir."

This surprised the two and then Wei Wuxian snickered while Lan Wangji's ears turned red.

"I will, shufu."

"Now give me my grandnephew."

Lan Yuan courtesy name Sizhui. He'll not be a memory of a lover, of a father that died for saving the innocents.

Yet he'll ask (insist in the most Lan Qiren way) to bestow the courtesy name and he knows that his *son* and nephew would allow him to do so. He'll still name him Sizhui, to remember his parents, Lan Xun, a relative who married out to join his wife, Wen Jian, and those who died in the landslide.

“Qiren! Give me my grandson! Hey! Lan Qiren where are you going?!”

“Laopo-“

“No, laogong! He cannot run away with A-Yuan. Qiren!”

“A-Ren, why don’t you-”

“You’ll have your time later, xiongzhang, saozi. It is my turn now. I was not able to play with A-Yu when they visited because of the additional classes saozi assigned to me.”

“You told me you love teaching! Qiren give me A-Yuan!”

“Later, saozi.”

And he heard Wei Wuxian’s laughter echoing and he turned to see Lan Wangji following behind. A-Yuan is excitedly squealing in his arms while tugging the ends of his forehead ribbon.

Lan Qiren found himself smiling. For now, he’ll coddle his grandnephew whom he doted on the memories of Wei Wuxian. He saw how Wei Wuxian teased him when they were having their tea for giving Sizhui candies even if he was old enough. He does not care, he’ll still do it this time... and it is not just him but his brother and sister-in-law are there too. They also have a bigger family now.

If one day, Wei Ying remembers, he’ll tell him.

If he does not, he’ll let him live his life and continue to carve his way.

He does not know what will happen to Yu Ziyuan, or Jiang Wanyin, or Yunmeng-Jiang.

Perhaps, it is karma for what she did years ago which she paid for her death.

This time, Lan Qiren thought that Yu Ziyuan would get to witness the result of her own actions but it seems like she would not be able to do so.

Still, he wishes for her safety and wellness.

Lan Qiren did not dare to know what happened to Yu Ziyuan and Wei Wuxian and *how* they time traveled... how it happened and what could be the reason behind it. As nainai said, there are a lot of unexplainable phenomena that happen in the world and so he'll let it be.

Now that the present has changed, he does not know what the future will hold.

But Lan Qiren is sure of one thing though, *all will be well when the day is done*.

"Airen, it is late, we have tucked A-Yue to sleep. Are we not calling it a day yet?"

"Aiyah! Xingan, 10 more minutes!"

Sizhui paused from removing his hair ornaments as he turned around to face her.

After returning from the Jingshi where they shared dinner with his parents who prepared the meal and some gifts for their daughter, they tucked their daughter to sleep and his wife went directly to the table to resume whatever she was doing before Sizhui fetched her for dinner.

"Airen," Sizhui approached her table as she seemed so busy that she had not lifted her head to check what he was doing.

"What is that?" He sat beside her and finally, his wife looked up with a silly grin on her face.

"I came from Tanzhou this morning."

"Yes. You accompanied some of the juniors on their night hunt yesterday. Is there something wrong?" Sizhui tilted his head and then he glanced at the table where he finally saw some parchments with scribbles and some talismans he did not recognize.

"We met a rogue cultivator."

Sizhui patiently waited for her to continue talking. His wife has a lot of similarities with his dearest baba, Wei Wuxian but if there is one thing that they are truly similar with, it would have to be the way they would tell stories. It would always sound interesting and as a doting husband that he is (something he learned from his a-die, Lan Wangji) he always gives her the reaction that she hopes for. Sizhui loves to see the smile on her face when he does it.

"She was selling these weird talismans that called the attention of the juniors."

"You allowed them to buy some?"

"Of course not." And then she sheepishly smiled which made Sizhui raise his brow.

"I swear, I did not intend to but she was so good at sales talking and I was curious so I approached her stall! Besides, a few silver pieces could help any rogue cultivators who are trying to earn money."

"Airen..."

"Aiyah! Here me out, xingan!"

Sizhui hummed and reached out to check the talisman. It was made with an expert hand. The strokes were smooth, the one who made it was sure of what they were doing even if Sizhui does not understand any of the characters.

"I do not recognize this talisman, even the characters are –"

"Weird, right?"

"Mn. Perhaps, baba knows them but –"

"But I will show it to him tomorrow."

“Because you know that a-die wouldn’t like you experimenting on strange things if you mentioned it during dinner earlier.”

His wife giggled and took another talisman to inspect it.

“She said that the one you are holding is a talisman that could grant a wish.”

“Airen, is there even such a thing?” Sizhui raised his brow as his wife grabbed the talisman from his hand.

“I don’t know but the rogue cultivator seemed trustworthy.”

“You do not even know her.”

“No, I don’t but I trust my intuition.”

Sizhui pursed his lips and hummed. The determined look on his wife’s face tells him that she is ready to defend the talismans she purchased even if it means spending another hour in front of the table instead of resting on their bed.

“She said that these talismans are special and that without having a pure intention, it will not activate.”

“Pure intention?”

“En! Something like... a wish made with a sincere heart and pure intention. It may be from the simplest one like getting dumplings for dinner because you have not tasted it for so long... or it could be odd like wishing for someone to heal from a certain sickness. The rogue cultivator said that there are no limits in coming up with your wish.”

Sizhui reached out and his wife handed it to him and he inspected it again. He does not even know if selling such bizarre talismans is allowed in Qinghe because he is sure that it is not allowed in Gusu. Nothing in the talisman looked familiar to his eyes. It will even look like scribbles in layman’s eyes.

“How could it be used by civilians since it is obviously sold to them?”

Seeing that she got his interest, his wife adjusted her position to face him even more.

“That’s the thing, activating it does not need a qi. Just this one,” his wife placed her palm on her chest where her heart is.

The more that his wife talks, the more that he thinks that it is a hoax and it will probably be confirmed by his baba tomorrow.

“I went through the research books of Wei-gonggong and I know that his books are more academic ones but I wanted to check.”

“And?”

“And if the greatest talisman maker -- inventor of his generation has not come up with something like this... what could have the rogue cultivator done to make something like this?”

“Did she have any customers who said it worked?”

The way his wife’s lips pursed as she is obviously thinking about defending the talisman again was the answer to Sizhui’s question. He could not help but smile as looked down at the talisman once more. His wife moved closer to his side.

“But think about it xingan... if this actually works... what would you wish for?”

And a lot of wishes came into Sizhui’s mind and it involves a lot of things from the past.

Even if he has long moved on from everything, he still has some what-ifs in his head. Of course, he would want to make a wish for his family... but then if there is someone whom he would use one wish for – it would be for his baba. Their protector, their savior, his a-die’s one true love. His baba deserves only good things in this world and if Sizhui could give him that, he’ll be the happiest.

“It will probably be for baba.”

Ouyang Lian smiled and nodded.

“What for Wei-gonggong?”

“I wish for him to have the best things in life... away from the pain, the suffering that he went through.”

A solemn expression passed through Lian’s face as she reached out to hold her husband’s free hand.

His baba is different now. He is happy, healthy, and loved... but Sizhui is also aware of his life in the past. His baba does not say much but Wei Wuxian became a household name and so people talk about him and Sizhui has learned to discern which of them is true and not. He is aware of what he had to go through in order to reach his current state and it is all with the help of his a-die and the important people in their lives. His baba’s past may have had some happy times but it was mostly filled with sadness, with tears, with pain and Sizhui’s heart always breaks when he hears them.

His a-die may not have grown up in the best environment but it was truly different from the environment his baba grew up with.

“You mean away from the Jiangs?”

“Airen...”

“Am I wrong though, xingan? You wouldn’t know this since you are from the north but there came a time in the south that people talked about the late Yu-furen. I grew up hearing her name. People created myths that unruly, brat children will be taken by her and they’ll turn

into – into – “ she obviously regretted saying that as she did not want to continue but Sizhui knew what’s next.

“Turn into someone like the Yiling Patriarch.”

“Xingan...”

Sizhui took a deep breath. He was probably too young at that time and truly, such myths never reached the south. The south had their own stories about the Yiling Patriarch in the 16 years that his baba was dead. His a-die made sure that he’ll learn about the Yiling Patriarch when he was older and could understand and weigh things properly.

“Jiang-zongzhu was so angry when he heard about it and lashed out -- getting angry with how people besmirch his mother’s name and connecting it to... someone like the Yiling Patriarch.”

“Baba does not say a lot about his life as a Jiang but... with all the stories that people, especially the older ones could still tell about him, about the Jiangs and the life in Lotus Pier before the war... I just – I just cannot imagine how he suffered and survived that. The verbal, physical.... Emotional abuse... I just – I just cannot imagine.”

“Oh, xingan.”

“So if I could make a wish, it would be for him not to experience such pain any more. I’d wish the same for a-die, for Ning-shushu and the family that I never got to meet.”

“Oh, xingan, come here.” Ouyang Lian pulled her husband in her embrace and hugged him like the way she hugs their little A-Yue to comfort her when their three-year-old daughter gets upset.

Ouyang Lian did not expect that a talk over a bizarre talisman made by a rogue cultivator would turn out this way. She is aware of how life was not kind to his in-laws, especially his Wei-gonggong. She is also aware of how much her husband loves his two fathers the most, Wen Qionglin, and his Wen family. Her heart broke and she loved him more the moment the esteemed Lan Sizhui bore his heart out to her and told her about his past.

She looked down at the talisman that her husband was holding and she carefully took it from him.

“Such a wish with a sincere heart and pure intention, I hope it comes true.”

Sizhui chuckled as he lifted his head from his wife’s shoulder and moved to fix her hair.

“Baba is living his best life with a-die now. What I said is just wishful thinking.”

“And there is nothing wrong with wishful thinking.”

Sizhui watched as his wife used the talismans as a bookmark on the research book by his baba and she closed it.

“Come, let us call it a day. I’ll go through that talisman tomorrow with Wei-gonggong. If it is unsafe, it is only right to inform Nie-zongzhu about this.”

Sizhui helped his wife stand up and they headed to their bed as his wife helped him remove his remaining hair ornaments.

Later that night, the couple turned off the lights with a wave of their hand after they checked their daughter who had successfully removed the blanket they tucked her in. The couple then exchanged a short kiss, sweet I love yous, and a promise of bringing A-Yue to Caiyi the next day as their daughter requested for it with a cute pout on her face.

In the silence of the night, one of the talismans stuck between the pages of the research book lit up. Wisps of light in different colors danced with the wind that colored the inside of the Hanshi, the current Sect Leader’s residence. It lasted for a few seconds before finally, the wisps dissipated and the peaceful night of the Hanshi continued once more.

Time will continue in this world while a new world was created... bringing back two souls that would fulfill the wish made with a sincere heart and pure intention. As they say, there are a lot of unexplainable phenomena – unexplainable things in our lives that sometimes, we just have to live with it.

Miles away from Cloud Recesses, a rogue cultivator in white smiled as the talisman burned in her hand.

“All will be well, all will be well.” She raised her hand as the ashes from the burned talisman flew in the air.

Adjusting the weimao on her head, she continued walking, trudging to where her feet would take her. Another wish was made and it will probably take some time before another wish made with a sincere heart and pure intention will be made.

“All will be well now.”

Chapter End Notes

1. I know the 'do not befriend evil' is the 52nd rule in canon and there are different versions of it such as 'reject the crooked path' etc but for this fic, I decided to separate the two that is why 'reject the crooked path' became the 50th rule so expect that the 52nd rule is still 'do not befriend evil'

2. For Wei Ying's title, I got it from my other fic, Light Source.

Guāngyuán (光源) - light source (source of light)

Guāng - 光 - light; ray; bright; shiny; glossy; smooth; only; merely; to use up

Yuán - 源 - root; source; origin

I honestly do not know if I got this one right but I hope I did as I just based it from my research 🙏

3. Xingan (心肝) literally means “heart and liver.” The English term “my heart and soul” might come close to the intense meaning of “心肝.” Overall, recognize that “心肝” is a very strong term of endearment, to be reserved only for those who are extremely precious to you.

4. Airen (“爱人” 爱(ài)) means “love” and “人(rén)” means “person/people,” so “爱人(àiren)” literally means “the person you love” and it can also mean 'spouse/husband/wife.'

5. gonggong- father-in-law

saozi- sister-in-law

xiongzhang/ ge- brother

shushu- uncle

Shifu- master

Shimu- master/teacher's wife

Nainai- grandmother/father's mother (in this fic, as no one truly knows Nainai's history, no one could tell why she is called Nainai so 😊😂) -> My apologies if I forgot anything



6. Weimao is a veiled hat

7. As the story progressed, even if everything happened for wangxian to have an early happy ending, I felt like they were becoming more background because of the plot and I did not want to change anything... and so I exchanged the positions in the relationship tags and put the 'minor or background relationship' first before the wangxian tag. I hope you understand 🙏

8. Yes, once again, there was a brief mention of Legend of Fei and The Wolf because I cannot help myself nfksflsdf

9. I hope that the end part answered the question as to what happened to Lan Zhan and Wei Ying in the 'past' and I will let you assume for the rest... including the identity of the Rogue Cultivator who sold the talisman Ouyang Lian bought 😊

My sincere apologies if I made any mistakes in any parts of the story 🙏

There are a lot of lapses but I still tried to end it with my favorite tag, Wangxian married with a son 💕

This really just started as something simple but I do not know how I ended up expounding it into an 8 chaptered fic but I truly hope that it was worth the wait for my updates and worth your time reading 🙏 I am truly thankful to each and every one of you. Your comments boost me up and always makes my day 💕

Always stay safe and have a nice day 💕

(PS: Just a TMI but since I am so thankful for all the well wishes I received with the previous TMI I shared, I would like to say that our household has recovered~ it took more than a month of stress lol before everything was cleared 😊🥰 Thank you so much for your well wishes and thank you for your understanding over the delay of my updates 🙏💕)

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